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1 Vol

LECTURES

ON THE

GOSPEL OF ST. MATTHEW;

DELIVERED IN THE

PARISH CHURCH OF ST. JAMES,

WESTMINSTER,

IN THE YEARS 1798, 1799, 1800, AND 1801.

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BEILBY PORTEUS, D.D.

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LECTURE XIV

MATTHEW xiv.

WE are now, in the course of these Lectures, arrived at the fourteenth chapter of St. Matthew, which begins in the following manner:

"At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus, and he said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist: he is risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him. For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife: for John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her. And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.

But when Herod's birth-day was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod: whereupon he promised with an oath, that he would give her whatsoever she would ask; and she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger. And the king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her, and he sent, and beheaded John in the prison; and his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel; and she brought it to her mother. And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus."

Before we enter upon this remarkable and affecting narrative of the murder of John the Baptist by Herod, it will be proper to take notice of the two first verses of this chapter, which gave occasion to the introduction of that transaction in this place, although it had happened some time before.

"At that time, says the Evangelist, Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus, and he said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist: he is risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him."

It is not easy to meet with a more striking instance than this of the force of conscience over a guilty mind, or a stronger proof how perpetually it goads the sinner, not only with well-grounded fears and apprehensions of impending punishment and vengeance, but with imaginary terrors and visionary dangers.

No sooner did the fame of Jesus reach the ears of the tyrant Herod, than it immediately occurred to his mind that he had himself, not long before, most cruelly and wantonly put to death an innocent, virtuous, and holy man, whose reputation for wisdom, integrity, and sanctity of manners, stood almost as high in the estimation of the world as that of Jesus; and who had even declared himself the herald and the forerunner of that extraordinary person.

This instantly suggested to him an idea the most extravagant that could be imagined, that this very person who assumed the name of Jesus was in fact no other than John the Baptist himself, whom he had beheaded, and who was now risen from the dead, and was endowed with the power of working miracles, though he never performed any when living.

It is evident that nothing could be more improbable and absurd than these suppositions, nothing more contrary even to his own principles; for there is reason to believe that Herod, like most other people of high rank at that time, was of the sect called the Sadducees, a sect which rejected the immortality of the soul, and the doctrine of a resurrection, and must therefore be perfectly adverse to the strange imagination of John the Baptist being risen from the dead. Yet the fears of Herod overruled all the prejudices of his sect, and raised up before his eyes the semblance of the murdered Baptist armed with the power of miracles, for the very purpose

purpose (he perhaps imagined) of inflicting exemplary vengeance upon him for that atrocious deed, as well as for his adultery, his incest, and all his other crimes; which now probably presented themselves in their most hideous forms to his terrified imagination, pursued him into his most secret retirements, and tortured his breast with unceasing agonies.

The evangelist having thus introduced the mention of John the Baptist, goes back a little in his narrative, to make the reader acquainted with that part of the Baptist's history which brought down upon him the indignation of Herod, and was the occasion of his death.

This flagitious prince had, it seems, in the face of day, and in defiance of all laws, human and divine, committed the complicated crime of adultery and incest, attended with every circumstance that could mark an abandoned and unprincipled mind.

He had been married a considerable time to the daughter of Aretas, king of

Arabia Petræa, but conceiving a violent passion for his brother Philip's wife, Herodias, he first seduced her affections from her husband, then dismissed his own wife, and married Herodias, during the life-time of his brother. It was impossible that such portentous wickedness as this could escape the observation or the reproof of the holy Baptist. He had the honesty and the courage to reproach the tyrant with the enormity of his guilt, although he could not be ignorant of the danger he incurred by such a measure; but he determined to do his duty, and to take the consequences. The consequences were, "that Herod laid hold of John, and bound him, and threw him into prison*." And undoubtedly his wish was to have put him immediately to death, but he was restrained by two considerations. The first was, because John was held in such high esteem and veneration by all the people, that had any violence been offered to him by Herod, he was apprehensive that it might

* Matt. xiv. 3.

might have occasioned a general insurrection against his government; for we are informed by St. Matthew, that "he feared the multitude, because they counted John as a prophet *."

The other reason was, that although he felt the utmost indignation and resentment against John for the freedom he had used in reproaching him for his licentious conduct, yet at the same time the character of that excellent man, his piety, his sanctity, his integrity, his disinterestedness, nay, even the courage which had so much offended and provoked him, commanded his respect and veneration, and excited his fears; for we are told expressly that *Herod feared John*, knowing he was a just man and an holy †. Nor is this all, he not only feared John, but in some degree paid court to him. He frequently sent for him out of prison, and conversed with him, and, as the evangelist expresses it, *observed* him; that is, listened to him with attention and with pleasure; nay, he went further

* Matt. xiv. 5. † Mark vi. 20.

still, *he did many things*, many things which John exhorted and enjoined him to do *. He perhaps showed more attention to many of his public duties, more gentleness to his subjects, more compassion to the poor, more equity in his judicial determinations, more regard to public worship; and vainly hoped, perhaps, like many other audacious sinners, that this partial reformation, this half-way amendment, would avert the judgments with which John probably threatened him. But the *main* point, the great object of John's reprehension, the incestuous adultery in which he lived, *that* he could not part with; it was too precious, too favourite a sin to give up; too great a sacrifice to make to conscience and to God.

What a picture does this hold out to us of that strange thing called human nature, of that inconsistence, that contradiction, that contrariety, which sometimes take place in the heart of man, unsanctified and unsubdued by the power of divine grace! and

* Mark vi. 20.

and what an exalted idea at the same time does it give us of the dignity of a truly religious character, like that of John, which compels even its bitterest enemies to reverence and to fear it; and forces even the most profligate and most powerful of men to pay an unwilling homage to excellence, at the very moment, perhaps, when they are meditating its destruction!

In this state of irresolution Herod might probably have continued, and the fate of John have remained undecided for a considerable time, had not an incident taken place, which determined both much sooner perhaps than was intended. Herod, on his birth-day, gave an entertainment to the principal officers of his army and of his court; and as a peculiar and very uncommon compliment on the occasion, Salome, the daughter of his wife Herodias by her former husband, came in and danced before the company in a manner so pleasing to Herod and to all his guests, that the king, in a sudden transport of delight, cried out to the damsel, as St. Mark

Mark relates it, "Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee." And he sware unto her, "whatsoever thou shalt ask of me I will give it thee, even unto the half of my kingdom *." The folly, the rashness, and the madness of such an oath as this, on so foolish an occasion, could be exceeded by nothing but the horrible purpose to which it was perverted by the young creature to whom it was made, or rather by her profligate instructor and adviser, her mother Herodias. Astonished and overwhelmed probably with the magnitude of such an unexpected offer, which laid at her feet half the wealth, the power, and the splendour of a kingdom, she found herself unable to decide between the various dazzling objects that would present themselves to her imagination, and therefore very naturally applies to her mother for advice and direction. Most mothers, on such an occasion, would have asked for a daughter a magnificent establishment, a situation of high rank and

* Mark vi. 22, 23.

and power! But Herodias had a passion to gratify, stronger perhaps than any other, when it takes full possession of the human heart, and that was revenge. She had been mortally injured, as she conceived, by the Baptist, who had attempted to dissolve her present infamous connection with Herod. And she not only felt the highest indignation at this insult, but was afraid that his repeated remonstrances might at length prevail. She therefore did not hesitate one moment what to ask; she gave way to all the fury of her resentment; and without the least regard to the character or the delicate situation of her inexperienced daughter, she immediately ordered her to demand the head of her detested enemy John the Baptist! The wretched young woman unfortunately obeyed this dreadful command; and, as we are told by the evangelist, "came in straightway with haste unto the king*." She came with speed in her steps, and eagerness in her eye, and said, "Give me here

* Mark vi. 25. Matt. xiv. 8.

here John the Baptist's head in a charger." This savage request appalled even the unfeeling heart of Herod himself. He did not expect it, and was not prepared for it; and although he was highly disgusted with John, yet, for the reasons above mentioned, he did not choose to go to extremities with him. He was therefore *exceeding sorry*, as the sacred historian informs us, to be thus forced upon so violent and hazardous a measure; "nevertheless for his oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given to her." Conceiving himself, most absurdly, bound by his oath, to comply even with this inhuman demand, and afraid lest he should be reproached by those that were around him with having broken his promise, he preferred the real guilt of murder to the false imputation of perjury, and "sent and beheaded John in prison; and his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel, and she brought it to her mother." It is well known that it was a custom in the east,

and is so still in the Turkish court, to produce the heads of those that are ordered to be put to death, as a proof that they have been really executed. But how this wretched damsel could so far subdue the common feelings of human nature, and still more the natural tenderness and delicacy of her sex, as not only to endure so disgusting and shocking a spectacle, but even to carry the bleeding trophy in triumph to her mother, it is not easy to imagine; and it would scarce be credited, did we not know that in times and in countries much nearer to our own, sights of still greater horror than this have been contemplated, even by women and children, with complacency and with delight.

Such was the conclusion of this singular transaction; and every part of it is so pregnant with useful instruction and admonition, that I shall stand excused, I hope, if I take up a little more of your time than is usual in discourses of this nature, in commenting somewhat at large

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on the conduct and characters of the several actors in this dreadful tragedy.

And in the first place, there can be no doubt that the most guilty and the most unpardonable of all the parties concerned in this murder of an innocent and excellent man was the abandoned Herodias. For it was she whose indignation against John was carried to the greatest length, and in the end effected his ruin. It was she who was continually importuning and urging Herod to put the Baptist to death, from which, for a considerable time, his fears restrained him. It was she who, as St. Mark expresses it, "*had a quarrel* against John, and would have killed him, but she could not*." The words translated, *had a quarrel against him*, have in the original much greater force and energy, Ενειχεν αυτω. She, as it were, fastened and hung upon John, and was determined not to let go her hold till she had destroyed him †.

We

* Mark vi. 19.

† Hesychius explains ενεχει by εγκειται, *sticks close to* in hatred or spite. Doddridge gives still greater force to the expression; but Parkhurst does not allow it.

We here see a fatal proof of the extreme barbarities to which that most diabolical sentiment of revenge will drive the natural tenderness even of a female mind; what a close connection there is between crimes of apparently a very different complexion, and how frequently the uncontrolled indulgence of what are called the softer affections, lead ultimately to the most violent excesses of the malignant passions. The voluptuary generally piques himself on his benevolence, his humanity, and gentleness of disposition. His claim even to these virtues is at the best very problematical; because in his pursuit of pleasure, he makes no scruple of sacrificing the peace, the comfort, the happiness of those for whom he pretends the tenderest affection, to the gratification of his own selfish desires. But however he may preserve his good humour, when he meets with no resistance, the moment he is thwarted and opposed in his flagitious purposes, he has no hesitation in going any lengths to gain his point, and will

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fight his way to the object he has in view through the heart of the very best friend he has in the world. The same thing we see in a still more striking point of view, in the conduct of Herodias. She was at first only a bold unprincipled libertine, and might perhaps be admired and celebrated, as many others of that description have been, for her good temper, her sensibility, her generosity to the poor; and with this character she might have gone out of the world, had no such person as John arisen to reprove her and her husband for their profligacy, and to endanger the continuance of her guilty commerce. But no sooner does he rebuke them as they deserved, than Herodias showed that she had other passions to indulge besides those which had hitherto disgraced her character; and that, when she found it necessary to her pleasures, she could be as cruel as she had been licentious; could contrive and accomplish the destruction of a great and good man, could feast her eyes with the sight of his mangled head

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in a charger, could even make her own poor child the instrument of her vengeance, and, as I am inclined to think, a *reluctant* accomplice in a most atrocious murder.

Here is a most awful lesson held out, not only to the female sex, but to both sexes, to persons of all ages and conditions, to beware of giving way to any one evil propensity in their nature, however it may be disguised under popular names, however indulgently it may be treated by the world, however it may be authorized by the general practice of mankind; because they here see that they may not only be led into the grossest extravagancies of that individual passion, but may also be insensibly betrayed into the commission of crimes of the deepest dye, which in their serious moments they always contemplated with the utmost horror.

Let us now take our leave of this wretched woman, and turn our attention for a moment to her unhappy daughter. Here undoubtedly there is much to blame, but

there is also something to pity and to lament. Her youth, her inexperience, her unfortunate situation in a most corrupt court, the vile example that was constantly before her eyes, the influence, the authority, the commands of a profligate mother, these are circumstances that plead powerfully for compassion, and tend in some degree to mitigate her guilt. Her first fault evidently was that gross violation of all decorum, and all custom too, in appearing and dancing publicly before Herod, and a large number of his friends assembled at a festive meeting, and perhaps half intoxicated with wine. But it is not probable that a young woman of high rank, and so very tender an age as she seems to have been, should have *voluntarily* taken such a step as this, or should have been able to subdue at once all the modesty and the timidity of her sex, and acquire courage enough to encounter the eyes and the observations of so licentious an assembly. There can be little doubt, that she was wrought upon by the persuasions of her artful

artful mother, who flattered herself that this artifice might produce some such effect in the mind of Herod as actually followed. What adds great weight to this conjecture is, that her next dreadful transgression, her singular and sanguinary request to have the head of John the Baptist presented to her, was unquestionably the suggestion of the abandoned Herodias.

The sacred historian expressly informs us, that it was in consequence of being *before instructed* of her mother, that she made this demand. Nor is this all; there is great reason to believe that it was with the utmost difficulty she was prevailed on to comply with the injunctions that were given her; for the original words προβιβασθεισα υπο της μητρος, which we translate *before instructed of her mother*, more strictly signify being *wrought upon*, *instigated*, and *impelled* by her mother; for this is the sense in which that expression is used by the best Greek writers.

This supposition receives no small confirmation from the manner in which she

is represented by the evangelist as delivering her answer to Herod. "She came straightway with haste unto the king;" she betrayed on her return the utmost emotion and agitation of mind. She had worked herself up to a resolution of obeying her mother; and was in haste to execute her commission, lest if any pause had intervened, her heart should relent, her spirits fail her, and she should not have courage to utter the dreadful demand she had to make.

All this seems to imply great reluctance on her part, and is evidently a considerable alleviation of her crime; yet does by no means exempt her from all guilt. For although obedience to parents is a very sacred duty, yet there is another duty superior to it, that which we owe to our Maker. And whenever even a parent would incite us to any thing plainly repugnant to his laws, as was the case in the present instance, we must, though with all possible decency and respect, yet with firmness and with courage, resist the impious

pious command, and declare it to be our decided resolution "to obey God rather than man."

The next person that claims our notice in this interesting narrative is Herod himself. We have already seen his inconsistent and undecided conduct respecting John. He had in a moment of exasperation thrown him into prison; but from a respect to his character, and fear of the consequences if he offered him any further violence, he suffered him to remain unmolested, and even frequently admitted him to his presence, and held conversations with him. And it is not improbable that after some time his resentment might have subsided, and he might have released his prisoner. But when once a man has involved himself deeply in guilt, he has no safe ground to stand upon. Every thing is unsound and rotten under his feet. He cannot say, "So far will I go in wickedness, and no farther." The crimes he has already committed may have an unseen connection with others, of which he has not the slightest

suspicion; and he may be hurried, when he least intends it, into enormities, of which he once thought himself utterly incapable. This was the case in the present instance. When Herod first engaged in his guilty intercourse with Herodias, he probably meant to go no further. He meant to content himself with adultery and incest, and had no intention of adding murder to the black catalogue of his crimes. He had no other view but the gratification of a present passion, and did not look forward to the many evils which scarce ever fail to arise from a criminal connection with a profligate and artful woman. This was the original and fruitful source of all his future crimes, and future misfortunes. He flattered himself that, notwithstanding his marriage with Herodias, he should still be master of his own resolutions and his own actions. But Herodias soon taught him a different lesson. She showed that she understood him much better than he did himself. She convinced him that his destiny was in her hands;

hands; that she held the secret wire that governed all his motions; and that she could, by one means or other, bend his mind to any purpose which she was determined to accomplish. It was *his* intention to save John the Baptist. It was *her* intention to destroy him, and she did it. He had, indeed, the courage to resist her repeated solicitations that he would put John to death; and he piqued himself probably on the firmness of his resolution. But Herodias was not of a temper to be discouraged by a few denials or repulses. She knew that there were other more effectual ways of carrying her point. If the king could not be compelled to surrender by assault, he might be taken by stratagem and surprise. And to this she had recourse. She saw that her daughter had attractions and accomplishments which might be turned to good account, which might be made to operate most powerfully on such a mind as Herod's.

She, therefore, as we have already seen, planned the project of her dancing before

him on the festival of his birth-day, in the hope that in the unguarded moments of convivial mirth, he might be betrayed into some concession, some act of indulgence towards this favourite daughter, from which he could not easily recede. The plan succeeded even probably beyond her expectations. The monarch was caught in the snare that was laid for him. He made a rash promise to Salome, and confirmed that promise by an oath, that he would give her whatsoever she would ask. And when, to his infinite astonishment and grief, she demanded the life of the man whom he wished to save, instead of retreating by the only way he had left, that of retracting a promise which it was madness to make, and the extremity of wickedness to perform, he was induced by a false point of honour (as worthless men frequently are) to commit an atrocious murder rather than violate a rash oath; an oath which could never make that right which was before intrinsically wrong, which could never bind him to any thing

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in itself unlawful, much less to the most unlawful of all things, the destruction of an innocent and virtuous man.

I have entered thus minutely into the detail of this remarkable transaction, because, as I have before remarked, every line of it is replete with the most important instruction; as, indeed, is the case with every part of the sacred history in the Gospel, and the Acts, which teach full as much by the facts they relate as by the precepts they inculcate. The moral lessons to be drawn from the passage before us, I have already pointed out in some degree as I went along; but there are one or two of a more general import, which I shall briefly add in conclusion, and which will deserve your very serious attention.

The first is, that in the conduct of life there is nothing more to be dreaded and avoided, nothing more dangerous to our peace, to our comfort, to our character, to our welfare here and hereafter, than a criminal attachment to an abandoned and unprincipled

unprincipled woman, more particularly in the early period of life. It has been the source of more misery, and, besides all the guilt which naturally belongs to it, has led to the commission of more and greater crimes, than perhaps any other single cause that can be named. We have seen into what a gulf of sin and suffering it plunged the wretched Herod. He began with adultery, and he ended with murder, and with the total ruin of himself, his kingdom, and all the vile partners of his guilt. The same has happened in a thousand other instances; and there are, I am persuaded, few persons here present, of any age or experience in the world, who cannot recollect numbers, both of individuals and of families, whose peace, tranquillity, comfort, characters, and fortunes, have been completely destroyed by illicit and licentious connections of this sort. Nor is this the worst. The present effects of these vices, dreadful as they sometimes are, cannot be compared with the misery which they are preparing

paring for us hereafter. The Scriptures every where rank these vices in the number of those *presumptuous* sins, which in a future life, will experience the severest marks of divine displeasure. The world, indeed, treats them with more indulgence. They are excused and palliated, and even defended, on the ground of human frailty, of natural constitution, of strong passions, and invincible temptations; and they are generally considered and represented in various popular performances (especially in those imported from foreign countries) as associated with many amiable virtues, with goodness of heart, with high principles of honour, with benevolence, compassion, humanity, and generosity. But whatever gentle names may be given to sensuality and licentiousness, whatever specious apologies may be made for them, whatever wit or talents may be employed in rendering them popular and fashionable, whatever numbers, whatever examples may sanction or authorize them, it is impossible that any thing can do away

away their natural turpitude and deformity, or avert those punishments which the Gospel has denounced against them. They are represented there as things that ought not even to be *named* among Christians, as defiling the man, as warring against the soul, as grieving the Spirit of God, as rendering men incapable of inheriting the kingdom of heaven, as exposing them to the indignation of Him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*. And as if men had endeavoured in those days, as well as in our own, to soften and extenuate and explain away the guilt of licentiousness, the Apostle adds, with great solemnity and great earnestness, "Let no man deceive you with *vain* words; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience†."

Let every man then that pretends to be a Christian, and lives in the habitual practice of the vices here condemned, weigh well

* Ephes. v. 3. Matt. xv. 18. 1 Pet. ii. 11. 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. Habak. i. 13. † Ephes. v. 6.

well these tremendous words. If there be any truth in the Gospel, they will not be *vain* words; nor will offences of this nature ever pass unnoticed or unpunished by the righteous Governor of the world.

These remarks are not introduced here without reason. It is the peculiar prevalence of these very vices at this moment which demands such animadversions as these; a prevalence which I infer not merely from an imaginary estimate of the low state of morals amongst us, founded on rumour, on conjecture, or misconstruction, but from facts too well ascertained, and which obtrude themselves on the notice of every observing mind *. I mean those daring violations of the nuptial contract, and the frequent divorces resulting from them, which seem daily gaining ground in this kingdom. This is a most melancholy and incontrovertible proof of increasing depravity amongst us; and I am sorry to add, of depravity of the very deepest dye; for instances have not long since

* In the Spring of the year 1800.

since occurred, in which the guilt of the parties too nearly resembled that of Herod, combining the two atrocious crimes of adultery and incest! Surely such enormities as these are enough to make us tremble, and loudly call for the interposition of the ligislature, lest they bring down upon us the just vengeance of an offended God. "Shall I not visit for these things? saith the Lord: Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this*?"

Another reflection arising from this short history of Herod and John the Baptist is this; that although, in the ordinary course of divine administrations, the punishment of the wicked does not *always* overtake them *here*, but is reserved for the last awful day of account; yet it sometimes happens (as I observed in my last Lecture) that their crimes draw after them their just recompence, even in the present life. This was eminently the case of the flagitious Herod; for besides those terrors of

* Jer. v. 9.

of conscience, which, as we have seen, perpetually haunted him, which raised up before him terrific forms and agonizing apprehensions, and represented John the Baptist as risen from the dead to avenge his crimes; we are informed by the historian Josephus, that his marriage with Herodias drew upon him the resentment of Aretas, king of Arabia Petræa, the father of his first wife, who declared war against him, and, in an engagement with Herod's army, defeated it with great slaughter. This, says the historian, the Jews considered as a just judgment of God upon Herod for his murder of John the Baptist*. And not long after this, both he and Herodias were deprived of their kingdom by the Roman emperor, and sent into perpetual banishment. And it is added by another historian †, that their daughter Salome met with a violent and untimely death. Instances like this are intended to show that the Governor of

* Jos. Ant. l. xviii. c. 5. s. 1. 2.

† Nicephori. Hist. Eccles. l. 11. p. 89.

of the universe, though he has appointed a distant period for the *general* distribution of his rewards and punishments, yet, in extraordinary cases, he will sometimes interpose to chastise the bold offender, to assert his superintending providence and supreme dominion over all his creatures, and to give them the most awful proofs, that, from his all-searching eye, no wickedness can be concealed.

The remaining part of this chapter is occupied with the recital of two miracles, on which I have only to observe, that they have both of them a spiritual as well as a literal meaning, are both of a very extraordinary nature, and calculated to make, as they did, a most powerful impression on the minds of the spectators; these were, the feeding above five thousand persons with five loaves and two fishes, and our Saviour's walking on the sea. The first of these had a reference to that spiritual food, that celestial manna, that bread of life, which our Lord was then dispensing in such abundance to those

those that hungered and thirsted after righteousness. The other was meant to encourage the great principle of faith; of *trust and reliance upon God*, in opposition to that self-confidence, that high opinion of our own strength, which we are too apt to entertain, and to which St. Peter, above all the other apostles, was peculiarly liable. When therefore, in consequence of his own request, he was permitted to go to Jesus on the water, and, forgetting immediately who was his guide and support, began to be afraid and to sink, and called out to his Divine Master to save him, our Lord graciously stretched forth his hand and caught him, and said unto him, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" A reproof well calculated to convince him that it was not in proportion to his own natural strength, but according to the degree of his faith, that he must rise or sink. And what he says to Peter, he says to all who waver in their belief: "O ye of little faith, why do ye doubt?"

But there is another circumstance belonging to these miracles, which is of great importance; they are very extraordinary and astonishing instances of our Lord's power over nature, and of such a kind as to admit of no possibility of being counterfeited. And accordingly we find that although some cheats have pretended to cure diseases miraculously, and some have even attempted to raise the dead, yet no impostor I believe has ever yet been so bold as to undertake to feed five thousand people at once with five loaves and two fishes, or to walk upon the sea. And the reason is plain. It would not be very easy to persuade five thousand people that they had been plentifully fed, when in fact they had received no nourishment at all; and it would be rather too dangerous an experiment for any man, not really supported by the hand of God, to attempt walking on the sea, when he cannot but know that the loss of life must be the inevitable consequence of it. Indeed this act has always been considered as utterly

beyond all human power to achieve; accordingly *two feet walking upon water* was an Ægyptian hieroglyphic to denote *impossibility*. And Job represents the power of *treading on the waves of the sea* as a distinguished mark and attribute *of the Deity* *. Yet this did Jesus do; this impossibility did he accomplish: a most incontestable proof that God was with him. And in fact, this miracle seems to have made a stronger impression on the minds of his disciples than any other recorded in the Gospels, even than that of raising the dead; for we are told in St. Mark †, that when our Lord went up into the ship, from *walking on the sea*, the disciples were *sore amazed* in themselves *beyond measure*, and wondered. The words in the original are still stronger; indeed so strong, that it is impossible for the English language to express all their force. In comparison of this miracle, even that of the loaves and fishes seems to have appeared nothing in the eyes of the disciples; for St. Mark

* Job ix. 8. † Chap. vi.

tells us, they considered not the miracle of the loaves, for their heart was hardened; but at the act of walking on the sea, they were *amazed beyond measure*; they were overwhelmed and overcome with this astonishing display of divine power; they fell instantly at the feet of Jesus, and worshipped him; and exclaimed, as every one who considers this stupendous miracle *must* do, "Of a truth *thou art the* SON OF GOD!"

LECTURE XV.

MATTHEW xvii.

I SHALL now request your attention to a very remarkable part of our Saviour's history, that which is called by the evangelists his TRANSFIGURATION, and which is related in the seventeenth chapter of St. Matthew. It so happens, that many years ago I turned my thoughts very much to this particular subject in the sacred writings, and ventured (though without my name) to lay my sentiments concerning it before the public. I could have wished therefore to have excused myself from repeating here any part of what I have said elsewhere, and to have passed over this incident unnoticed. But when I considered that this transaction is

of a very peculiar and extraordinary nature; that there are circumstances attending it which cannot fail to excite the curiosity of an inquisitive mind; that there are difficulties in it which stand in need of a solution, and conclusions to be drawn from it of considerable utility and importance; when I considered further, that much the greatest part of this audience had probably never seen or ever heard of what I had formerly written on this subject; I determined not to omit so material a part of the task I am engaged in, but to give you what I conceive to be the true explanation of this interesting event. And I now feel the less difficulty in doing this, because, upon a careful review of that interpretation, after an interval of twelve years, I am still convinced of its truth, and have had the additional satisfaction of finding it confirmed by the authority of some learned and judicious commentators, whose opinions on one or two leading principles coincide with my own; but whose observations I had not seen (having consulted

consulted but very few expositors on the subject) when my essay went to the press.

The relation of this singular transaction is given us by three out of four evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and alluded to in the writings of the fourth. They all agree in the main points. There is no material variation, and not the least contradiction between them. But, as it is very natural, where different persons relate the same fact (and as indeed must generally happen where the story is not concerted among them) a few particulars are taken notice of by some which are passed over in silence by others. St. Matthew's account of it is as follows:

"And after six days, Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them; and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for

us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and behold, a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only. And as they came down from the mount, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.

"And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes, that Elias must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias shall truly first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, that Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed: likewise also shall the

the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist."

Such is the history which the evangelist gives us of the transfiguration; and on the very first view of it, every one must see that a transaction of so uncommon and splendid a nature could not be intended merely to surprise and amuse the disciples. There must have been some great object in view; some end to be obtained, worthy of the magnificent apparatus made use of to accomplish it.

Now there were, I conceive, (besides some collateral and subordinate designs) two principal and important purposes, which were meant to be answered by this illustrious scene.

The first was, to set before the eyes of the disciples a *visible and figurative representation of Christ's coming in glory to judge the world, and to reward, with everlasting felicity, all his faithful servants.*

In order to prove this, and at the same time to bring to the reader's view those circumstances

circumstances which preceded, and in some degree gave occasion to the celestial vision, it will be necessary to look back to the chapter immediately before that in which the transfiguration is related.

In the 21st verse of the sixteenth chapter we find, that Jesus then, for the first time, thought fit to give some intimations to his disciples of the strange and extraordinary scenes he was soon to pass through; his sufferings, his death, and his resurrection; things of which, before this declaration, they seem not to have had the smallest conception or suspicion.

"From that time forth began Jesus to shew to his disciples how that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day*."

The information, so perfectly new and unexpected to the disciples, and so destructive of all the fond hopes they had hitherto indulged, overwhelmed them with astonishment

* Matt. xvi. 21.

astonishment and grief. And St. Peter, whose natural warmth and eagerness of temper generally led him both to feel such mortifications more sensibly, and to express his feelings more promptly and more forcibly, than any of the rest, was so shocked at what he had just heard, that "he took Jesus, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee." Our Saviour, who saw every thing that passed in his mind, and perceived, probably, that this expostulation took its rise more from disappointed interest and ambition than from a generous concern for his Master's credit and honour, gave him an immediate and severe reproof. "Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou art an offence to me; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."

He then proceeded to show, not only that he himself must suffer persecution, but that all those who would at that time come after him, and share with him the arduous and dangerous task of sowing

the

the first seeds of the Gospel, "must deny themselves, and take up their cross, and follow him." But then, to support them under those severe injunctions, he cheers them immediately with a brighter scene of things, and with a prospect of *his* future glory, and *their* future recompense. "The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then shall he reward every man according to his works." And he adds, "Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." The meaning of these last words I shall enquire into hereafter. But the evident tendency of the whole passage is to prepare the minds of his disciples for the cruel treatment which both he and they were to undergo; and at the same time to raise their drooping spirits, by setting before their eyes his own exaltation, and their glorious rewards in another life.

This discourse, however, he probably found had not sufficiently subdued their prejudices,

prejudices, and reconciled them to his state of humiliation; and therefore he determined to try a method of impressing them with juster sentiments, which he frequently had recourse to on similar occasions; and that was, representing to them, by a *significant action*, what he had already explained by words.

Accordingly, within a few days after the foregoing conversation, he taketh with him Peter, James, and John, and bringeth them up into a high mountain (probably Mount Tabor) apart. Very fanciful reasons have been assigned by some of the commentators for his taking with him only three of his disciples. But all that it seems necessary to say on this head is, that as the law required no more than two or three witnesses to constitute a regular and judicial proof, our Saviour frequently chose to have only this number of witnesses present at some of the most important and interesting scenes of his life. The three disciples, whom he now selected, were those that generally attended

attended him on such occasions, and who seem to have been distinguished as his most intimate and confidential friends. St. John, we know, was so in an eminent degree. St. James, his brother, would, from that near connection, probably be brought more frequently under his Master's notice; and as St. Peter was the very person who had expressed himself with so much indignation on the subject of our Saviour's sufferings, it was highly proper and necessary that he should be admitted to a spectacle, which was purposely calculated to calm those emotions, and remove that disgust which the first mention of them had produced in his mind.

With these companions, then, Jesus ascended the mountain, and was transfigured before them; "and behold, there appeared Moses and Elias talking with him." They were not only *seen* by the disciples, but they were *heard* also conversing with Jesus. This is a circumstance of great importance, especially when we are told what the subject of their conversation

sation was. St. Luke gives us this useful piece of information; he says, that "they spake of our Lord's decease, which he should accomplish at Jerusalem." The very *mention* of Christ's sufferings and death by such men as Moses and Elias, without any marks of surprise or dissatisfaction, was of itself sufficient to occasion a great change in the sentiments of the disciples respecting those sufferings, and to soften those prejudices of theirs against them, the removal of which seems to have been one of the more immediate objects of the transfiguration. But if we suppose further (what is far from being improbable) that in the course of the conversation several interesting particulars respecting our Saviour's crucifixion were brought under discussion; if they entered at any length into that important subject, *the great work of our redemption*; if they touched upon the nature, the cause, and the consequences of it; the pardon of sin, the restitution to God's favour, the triumph over death, and the gift of eternal life;

life; if they showed that the sufferings of Christ were prefigured in the law, and foretold by the prophets; it is easy to see, that topics such as these must tend still further to open the eyes, and remove the prepossessions of his disciples; and the more so, because they would seem to arise incidentally in a discourse between other persons casually overheard; which having no appearance of design or professed opposition in it, would be apt to make a deeper impression on their minds than a direct and open attack upon their prejudices.

But the circumstance which would, probably, be most effectual in correcting the erroneous ideas of his disciples on this head, was the act of the transfiguration itself, the astonishing change it produced in the whole of our Lord's external appearance.

From the expressions made use of by the several evangelists, this change appears to have been a very illustrious one. They inform us, that, "as our Saviour prayed,

the fashion of his countenance was changed; his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment became exceeding white and glistering; as white as snow, as white as the light, so as no fuller on earth could whiten it." Now Christ having assumed this splendid and glorious appearance, at the very time when Moses and Elias were conversing with him on his sufferings, it was a *visible* and striking proof to his disciples, that those sufferings were not, as they imagined, any real discredit and disgrace to him, but were perfectly consistent with the dignity of his character, and the highest state of glory to which he could be exalted.

But further still; Jesus had (in the conversation mentioned in the preceding chapter) told his disciples, that the Son of man should come *in the glory of his Father*, with his holy angels, to judge the world. The scene on the Mount therefore *which so soon followed that conversation*, was probably meant to convey to them some idea and some evidence *of his*

coming in glory at the great day of judgment, of which his transfiguration was, perhaps, as just a picture and exemplification as human sight could bear.

It is, indeed, described in nearly the same terms that St. John in the Revelation applies to the Son of man in his *state of glory* in heaven. "He was clothed (says he) with a garment down to the foot. His head and his hair were white like wool, white as snow; and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength." It is remarkable, that St. Luke calls his appearance, after being transfigured, *his glory*. St. John, who was likewise present at this appearance, gives it the same name. "We beheld *his glory*, as of the only-begotten of the Father." And St. Peter, who was another witness to this transaction on the Mount, refers to it by a similar expression. "For he received (says that Apostle) from God the Father, *honour and glory*, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

pleased *." There can hardly therefore remain any doubt, but that *the glory which Christ received from the Father*, on the mountain, was meant to be a representation of his coming *in the glory of his Father*, with his holy angels, at the end of the world; which is one of the topics touched upon in the preceding chapter.

Another thing there mentioned was *our Saviour's resurrection*. Of this, indeed, there is no direct symbol in the transfiguration; but it is evidently implied in that transaction; because Jesus is there represented in his glorified, celestial state, which being in the natural order of time subsequent to his resurrection, that event must naturally be supposed to have previously taken place.

But though this great event is only indirectly alluded to here, yet those most important doctrines which are founded upon it, *a general resurrection, and a day of retribution*, are expressly represented in the transfiguration.

* 2 Pet. i. 17.

In the sixteenth chapter of St. Matthew, Christ tells his disciples, that when "he comes in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels, he will reward every man according to his works*:" from whence it necessarily follows, that every man who is dead shall rise from the grave. And in confirmation of both these truths, there are two just and righteous men, Moses and Elias, who had many years before departed out of the world, brought back to it again, and represented (as we shall see hereafter) in a state of glory. That they actually appeared in their own proper persons, there is not the least reason to doubt. Grotius even goes so far as to affirm, that their bodies were *reserved* for this very purpose. But there is no necessity and no ground for this imagination. For though, indeed, the sepulchre of Moses was not known, yet his body was actually buried in a valley in the land of Moab, and therefore must have seen corruption; and as the whole transaction was

* Ver. 27.

was miraculous, it was just as easy to Omnipotence to restore life and form to a body mouldered into dust, as to reanimate a body that was preserved uncorrupted and entire; and, indeed, was a much exacter emblem of our own resurrection. We may, however, readily admit, what some learned men have justly observed, that Elias, having been carried up into heaven without undergoing death, he was here a proper representative of those who shall be found *alive* at the day of judgment, as Moses is of those who had died, and are raised to life again. And his appearance a second time on earth, after he had been so many ages dead and buried, must have been a convincing proof to the disciples (had they duly attended to it) of the possibility of a resurrection.

And what is no less important, the *manner* in which both Moses and Elias appeared on this occasion, afforded the disciples an ocular demonstration of *a day of retribution*, agreeably to what their

Divine Master had a few days before told them, *that he would reward every man according to his works.*

For as we are informed, that both Moses and Elias appeared also in *glory*; a glory somewhat similar, we may suppose, though far inferior, to that with which Christ was invested; like him they were probably clothed in raiments of unusual whiteness and splendour; and the fashion of their countenances might also be changed to something more bright and illustrious. Now this would be a just representation of the *glorified state* of saints in heaven, of those who had been rewarded according to their works. For we find those holy men, who have passed victoriously through their Christian warfare, described by St. John as clothed *in white raiments* *; and by St. Matthew, as *shining forth* like *the sun* in the kingdom of their Father †.

The *glory of Christ* therefore on the mountain, was a symbol of his exaltation to be the judge of the earth; and the *glory*

* Rev. iii. 5. † Matt. xiii. 43.

glory of Moses and Elias, was an emblem of the rewards given to the righteous in heaven.

When all these circumstances are put together, they throw considerable light over the concluding part of Christ's conversation, which has not yet been noticed. *Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom* *. This has commonly been supposed to refer to the signal manifestation of Christ's power in the destruction of Jerusalem. But we know of no one of Christ's disciples that survived this event, except St. John; and our Saviour here speaks of more than one. But besides this, in the 27th verse of this chapter, we are told that *the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, to reward every man according to his works.* This, undoubtedly, relates to Christ's final advent to judge the world.

* Matthew xvi. 28.—St. Mark says, "Till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power."—St. Luke, "till they see the kingdom of God."

world. When, therefore, it immediately follows in the very next verse, Verily, I say unto you, that there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death *till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom*; is it not most natural, is it not almost necessary to understand these similar expressions as relating to the same great event?

But did Christ then mean to say here that some of his disciples should live to the day of judgment? Most assuredly not. He meant only to intimate that a few of them should, before their death, be favoured with a *representation* of the glorious appearance of Christ and his saints on that awful day. And this illustrious scene was actually displayed to three of them, about six days after, in the transfiguration on the mountain. Indeed St. Peter himself, who was present at the transfiguration, plainly alludes to it, in a manner which powerfully confirms this opinion. "We have not," says he, "followed cunningly devised fables, when we made.

made known unto you the *power* and *coming* of our Lord Jesus Christ." That is, our Lord's coming in his *kingdom* with *power* and *glory*, and *majesty*, to judge the world. And how does St. Peter here prove that he will so come? Why, by declaring that he and the two other disciples, James and John, were *eye-witnesses of his majesty*; that is, they actually saw him on the mount, invested with *majesty* and *glory* similar to that which he would assume in his kingdom at the last day. "For," continues the Apostle, "he received from God the Father, *honour* and *glory*, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; and this voice, which came from heaven, we heard, *when we were with him in the holy mount* *."

This is St. Peter's own comment on the transfiguration, in which he expressly compares Christ's *glory* and *majesty* on the Mount, to that which he will display in his

* 2 Pet. i. 16, 17, 18.

his final advent; and considers the former as an emblem, an earnest, and a proof of the latter.

It is then evident, I think, from the foregoing observations, that the scene upon the mountain was a *symbolical representation of Christ's coming in glory to judge the world, and of the rewards which shall then be given to the righteous*, topics which had been touched upon in Christ's discourse with his disciples six days before; and that one great object of this expressive action, as well as of that conversation, was to reconcile the minds of his disciples to the sufferings which both he and they were to undergo, by showing that they were preparatory and subservient to *his* future glory, and *their* future rewards.

The other great purpose of the action on the Mount was, I apprehend, to signify, in a figurative manner, *the cessation of the Jewish and the commencement of the Christian dispensation.*

It appears to have been one prevailing prejudice among the disciples, that the whole

whole Mosaical law, the ceremonial as well as the moral, was to continue in full force under the Gospel; and that the authority of Moses and the prophets was not, in any respect, to give way on the establishment of Christianity, but to be placed on an equal footing with that of Christ.

To correct this erroneous opinion, no less than to vanquish their prepossessions against the sufferings of Christ (as already explained), was the scene of the transfiguration presented to the three chosen disciples, Peter, James, and John.

There are several remarkable circumstances attending that event, which lead us to this conclusion.

Moses and Elias must certainly be allowed to be very natural and proper representatives of the *law* and the *prophets*.

When the three disciples saw these illustrious persons conversing familiarly with Jesus, it probably confirmed them in their opinion, that they were to be considered as of *equal* dignity and authority with

with him; and under this impression, Peter immediately addressed himself to Jesus, and said, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; and if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias." The full meaning of which exclamation was, "What greater happiness, Lord, can we experience than to continue here in the presence of three such great and excellent persons! Here then let us for ever remain! Here let us erect three tents, for thee, for Moses, and Elias, that you may all make this the constant place of your abode, and that we may always continue under the protection and government, and UNITED EMPIRE of our three illustrious lords and masters, whose sovereign laws and commands we are *equally* bound to obey!"

The answer to this extraordinary proposal was instantly given both by action and by words. "While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and, behold, a voice out of the cloud, which

which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: HEAR YE HIM."

The CLOUD is the well-known token of the divine presence under the law: many instances of it occur in the Old Testament, but more particularly at the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. On the mountain where our Saviour was transfigured, a new law was declared to have taken place; and therefore God again appears in a *cloud*. But there is one remarkable difference between these two manifestations of the divine presence. On Mount Sinai the cloud was *dark* and *thick*: "and there were thunders and lightnings, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud, and all the people that were in the camp *trembled* *." At the transfiguration, on the contrary, the cloud was *bright*, the whole scene was luminous and transporting, and nothing was heard but the mild paternal voice of the Almighty expressing his delight in his beloved Son. These striking differences in the two appearances

* Exod. xix. 16.

appearances evidently point out the different tempers of the two dispensations; of which, the former, from its severity, was more calculated to excite terror; the latter, from its gentleness, to inspire love.

This circumstance alone, therefore, indicated a happy change in the divine œconomy; but the gracious words which issued from the cloud most clearly explained the meaning of what was passing before the eyes of the disciples, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: HEAR YE HIM." "This is my *Son*, not as Moses and all the prophets were, my *servants*. HIM, and him only, you are now to hear. He is from henceforth to be your lord, your legislator, and your king. The evangelical law being established, the ceremonial law must cease; and MOSES and the PROPHETS must give way to CHRIST." With this declaration, the conclusion of the whole scene on the mountain perfectly harmonizes. Moses and Elias instantly disappear, and "when the disciples lift up their

their eyes, they see no man save Jesus only." The former objects of their veneration are no more. Christ remains *alone* their unrivalled and undisputed sovereign.

In support of this interpretation it may be further observed, that there was reason to expect about that time, some such declaration as this respecting the cessation of the Mosaical law. For St. Luke informs us, that the "law and the prophets were until John;" that is, they were to continue in force till John the Baptist had (as our Lord expresses it) *restored all things*, had preached those great doctrines of repentance and redemption by the blood of Christ, by which men were *restored* to a right state of mind, and the favour of God; till he had thus prepared the way for the Messiah, and publicly announced the kingdom of God; and then they were to be superseded by the Christian dispensation. Accordingly, not long after the death of John, the scene of the transfiguration took place; and this great revolution, this substitution of a new

system

system for the old one, was made known in that remarkable manner to the three disciples. This secondary meaning here assigned to the vision on the Mount, will assist us in explaining an injunction of our Lord to his disciples, for which, though other reasons have been assigned, yet they are not, I think, altogether satisfactory.

In the 9th verse we are told, that as they came down from the Mount, Jesus charged the disciples, saying, "Tell the vision to no man, till the Son of man be risen again from the dead."

If the only intent of the transfiguration had been to represent, by an expressive action, our Lord's resurrection and exaltation, and a future day of retribution, it is not easy to assign a sufficient reason why this injunction of secrecy, till after his resurrection, should have been given; because he had already foretold his resurrection to his disciples *, and he also apprised them, before his death, of his coming in glory to judge the world †. It does

* Chap. xvi. 21. † Chap. xxv.

does not therefore appear, how the publication of the vision on the Mount could have been attended with any other consequence, than that of *confirming* what Jesus had already made known.

But if we suppose that *one* purpose of the transfiguration was to typify the abotion of the ceremonial law, and the establishment of the evangelical, a plain reason presents itself for this command of keeping it for some time private; for it was one of those truths which the first converts were not able to bear. Great numbers of them, though they firmly believed in Christ, yet no less firmly believed that the Mosaical dispensation was still in full force. This prejudice, it is well known, continued several years after our Lord's resurrection. Mention is made "of several thousand Jews who believed, "and yet were all zealous of the law." And it was the suspicion that St. Paul had forsaken, and taught others to forsake Moses, which brought his life into the most imminent danger, and actually occa-

sioned his imprisonment. No wonder then that a transaction which was designed to prefigure this very doctrine that St. Paul was charged with, and that was so offensive to the Jewish converts in general, should be thought unfit by our Lord to be publicly divulged till some time, perhaps a considerable time, after his resurrection.

From the whole, then, of the preceding observations, it appears, that the transfiguration of Christ was one of those emblematical actions, or figurative representations, of which so many instances have been pointed out, and at the same time very distinctly explained, and elegantly illustrated, by some of our best divines.

The things represented by this significant transaction were:

First, the future glory of Christ, a general resurrection, and a future retribution.

Secondly, the abrogation of the Mosaical, and the establishment of the evangelical dispensation.

And the *immediate* purpose of these representations was, as I before observed,

to

to correct two inveterate prejudices which prevailed among the disciples, and the Jewish converts in general.

Of these, one was the extreme offence they took at any mention of the death and sufferings of Christ, which they conceived to be utterly inconsistent with his dignity.

The other was their persuasion that the ceremonial law was not done away by the Gospel, but that they were to exist together in full force, and to have an equal obedience paid to them by all the disciples of Christ.

But though the removal of these prejudices was, as I conceive, the primary and immediate design of the transfiguration, yet there are also purposes of great utility to all Christians in general, in every age, which it might be, and probably was, intended to answer.

In the first place, it affords one more additional proof of the divine mission of Christ, and the divine authority of his religion.

It is one of the few occasions on which God himself was pleased, as it were, *personally to interpose*, and to make an open declaration from heaven in favour of his Son; "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him." Two other instances only of this kind occur in the Gospels; one at our Saviour's baptism, the other on his praying to his Father to save him from the sufferings that awaited him.

Now these signs from heaven may be considered *as a distinct species of evidence*, different both from miracles and prophecies, frequently and earnestly wished for by the Jews, but not granted to them, nor vouchsafed to any one, but very sparingly, and on great and solemn occasions.

But besides this awful testimony to the divine origin of our religion in general, a particular attestation was (as we have seen) given on the Mount to two of its principal doctrines, A GENERAL RESURRECTION, and A DAY OF RETRIBUTION. The visible

visible and illustrious representation of these in the glorified appearance of Christ, and Moses and Elias, has been already explained, and is appealed to by St. Peter, who saw it, as one convincing proof, among others, that "he had not followed cunningly devised fables," when he made known "the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." And, indeed, since these two doctrines, a RESURRECTION, and A DAY OF JUDGMENT, are two of the most essential and fundamental articles of our faith; and since it was one of the chief purposes of the Christian revelation, "to bring life and immortality to light," no wonder that God should graciously condescend to confirm these great truths to us in so many various ways; by words and by actions, by prophecies, by miracles, and by celestial visions.

LECTURE XVI.

MATTHEW xviii.

THE subject of this Lecture is a part of the eighteenth chapter of St. Matthew.

It is evident that the disciples of our Lord were, for a considerable time, possessed with the imagination which prevailed universally among the Jews respecting their Messiah, that their Master's kingdom was to be a temporal one; that he was at some time or other to become a prince of great power and splendour, and that they of course should enjoy the largest share of his favour, and be placed in situations of great distinction and great emolument. And this delusion had taken such strong hold upon their minds, that although

although our Lord took frequent opportunities of combating their error, and made use of every means in his power to undeceive them, yet they still persisted in maintaining their favourite opinion; and in the beginning of this chapter they came to Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? It appears, from the parallel passage in St. Mark, that they had been disputing by the way who should be the greatest. Our Lord knowing this, and finding that all he had said on this subject had produced no effect upon them, determined to try whether a different mode of conveying his sentiments to them might not strike their minds more forcibly. He therefore had recourse (as in the case of the transfiguration) to what may be called a visible kind of language. He took a little child, and, placing him before them, bid them contemplate the innocence and simplicity, the meekness and humility which marked its countenance; and then assured them, that unless they were converted, and

became as little children; that is, unless a total change took place in the temper and disposition of their minds, unless they became as unambitious and unaspiring, as meek, as humble and contented, as little concerned about worldly honours and distinctions, as the child before them, they could not enter into the kingdom of heaven; they could never be considered as true objects of Christ's kingdom here, or be capable of inheriting the rewards of heaven hereafter. In the eye of God, true humility is a most sublime virtue; and whoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Our Lord then goes on to say, "Whosoever receiveth one such little child in my name, receiveth me." That is, it is men of humble minds and meek dispositions, whom I most highly prize, and whom I most strongly recommend to the notice, the kindness, the protection of all those who are friends to me and my religion; and so dear are men of this description to me, that I make

their

their interests my own, and I shall consider every man who receives, and assists, and encourages them on my account, and for my sake, as receiving me. But if, instead of receiving and protecting these my humble disciples, any one should dare to injure them, he must expect the severest marks of my displeasure. "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world, because of offences; for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh."

In order to comprehend the full meaning of this denunciation, it will be necessary to explain the peculiar meaning of the word *offend*. Now this expression in the present passage, as well as in many other parts of the New Testament, signifies to cause any one *to fall from his faith*, to renounce his belief in Christ by any means whatever; and against every one that

that makes use either of violence or artifice to terrify or seduce the sincere and humble, and unsuspicious believer in Christ from his faith and obedience to his divine Master, the severest woes, and the heaviest punishments are here denounced.

This text of Scripture therefore I would most earnestly recommend to the serious consideration of those who either are or have been guilty of this most dangerous crime; and I would also no less earnestly caution all those who have not yet been guilty of it, to avoid, with the utmost care, every degree of it, and every approach to it. It is a crime often touched upon in Holy Writ, but less noticed, or at least less enlarged upon by divines and moralists than perhaps any other sin of the same magnitude. For this reason I shall enter more fully into the consideration of it than has hitherto, I believe, been usually done, and shall advert briefly to the several modes of *making our brother to offend*, that is, to renounce his faith in Christ, which are most common and most successful;

successful; and these are persecution, sophistry, ridicule, immoral examples, and immoral publications.

With respect to the first of these, persecution; it was, during the first ages of the Gospel, and for many years after the Reformation, the great *rock of offence*, the chief instrument made use of (and a dreadful one it was) to deter men from embracing the faith of Christ, or to compel them to renounce it. But since that time we have heard little of its terrors, till they were some years ago revived, to a certain degree, in a neighbouring nation, where the various cruelties inflicted on their clergy are too well known, and cannot surely be ascribed altogether and exclusively to political causes.

In our own country, it must be acknowledged, we cannot justly be charged with this species of guilt. Intolerance and persecution are certainly not in the number of our national sins. But in the next mode of making our brother to offend, that is, by grave argument and reason, by

open

open and systematic attacks on the truth and divine authority of the Christian revelation, in this we have, I fear, a large load of responsibility upon our heads.

It has even been affirmed by some, that we are entitled to the distinction of having led the way to this kind of impiety and profaneness. We have this honour given to us (for an honour *they* esteem it) by foreign writers, and what is worst of all, we are applauded for it by such men as D'Alembert and Voltaire.

To be stigmatized with *their* praise, and for such a reason, is a disgrace indeed; and it would be a still greater, if we could not justly disclaim and throw back from ourselves the humiliating and ignominious applause which they would inflict upon us. But this I apprehend we may effectually do. There appears to me sufficient ground for asserting, that the earliest infidels of modern times were to be found, not in this island, but on the Continent. If we may credit the account given of Peter Aretin (who lived and wrote

in

in the fourteenth century) by Moreri, and particularly the epitaph upon him, which he recites, there is reason to believe that he was an infidel of the worst species; and Viret, a divine of great eminence among the first reformers, who wrote about the year 1563, speaks of a number of persons, both in France and Italy, who had assumed the name of Deists, and seem to have formed themselves into a sect. But it was not till the beginning of the following century that any men of that description, or any publications hostile to Revelation, appeared in this kingdom. From that time indeed down to the present, there has been a regular succession of anti-christian writers of various descriptions and various talents, whose uniform object has been to subvert the foundations of revealed religion, and to make their countrymen *offend*, and renounce their faith. The last of these was a man, who, from the lowest origin, raised himself to some distinction in the political and literary world, by his bold and impious

libels

libels against government, against religion, and the holy Scriptures themselves. In these writings were concentrated all the malignity, all the shrewdness, all the sophistry of his numerous predecessors; and from their brevity, their plainness, their familiarity, their vulgar ribaldry, their bold assertions, and artful misrepresentations, they were better calculated to impose on the ignorant and uninformed, and more dangerous to the principles of the great mass of mankind, than any publications that this country ever before produced. And certain it is, that having been distributed with infinite industry through every district of the kingdom, they did for a time diffuse their poison far and wide, and made a strong and fatal impression on the multitude. But, thanks be to God! they at length providentially met with talents infinitely superior to those of their illiterate author, which, with the blessing of Heaven upon them, gave a sudden and effectual check to the progress of this mischief, and afforded a striking

striking proof of the truth of that prophecy respecting the stability of our religion, "that the gates of hell shall never prevail against it."

The next great engine of offence, by which multitudes have been led to renounce their faith, is *ridicule*. An attempt was made early in the last century to erect this into *a test of truth*, and it has accordingly been applied by many writers since that time to throw discredit on the Christian revelation. But by no one has this weapon been employed with more force and with more success than by the great patriarch of infidelity, Voltaire. It is the principal instrument he makes use of to vilify the Gospel; and among the instructions he gives to his coadjutors and fellow-labourers in this righteous work, *one* is to load the Christian religion and the Author of it with never-ceasing ridicule, to burlesque it in every way that imagination can suggest, and to deluge the world with an infinity of little tracts, placing Revelation in the most ludicrous point

point of view, and rendering it an object of mirth and of contempt to the lowest of mankind. This method he strictly pursued himself; to this he bent all the powers of his mind, all the vivacity of his wit, all the fire of his imagination; and whoever examines his writings against Christianity with care, will find that much the largest part of them are of this description. And in this he showed a thorough knowledge of the world. He knew that mankind in general prefer wit to logic, and love to be entertained rather than convinced; that it is much easier to point an epigram than to produce an argument; that few can reason justly, but that all the world can be made to laugh; and that whatever can be rendered an object of derision, is almost sure to be rejected without examination. Of all these artifices he has availed himself with infinite address, and we know also with fatal success. His writings have unquestionably produced more infidels among the higher classes, and spread more general corruption

tion over the world, than all the voluminous productions of all the other philosophists of Europe put together.

There is still another way of making our brother to *offend*, or in other words of shaking his faith in the Gospel; and that is by exhibiting to mankind in our life and conversation a profligate example.

This, in the first place, gives the world an unfavourable idea of the religion we profess. It tempts men to think either that we ourselves do not believe it, or that we suppose it consistent with the vices to which we are abandoned; and either of these suppositions must considerably lessen their estimation both of its doctrines and its precepts.

In the next place a wicked example, as we all know, tends to corrupt in some degree every one that lives within its baneful influence; more particularly if it be found in men of high rank, great wealth, splendid talents, profound erudition, or popular characters. The mischief done by any notorious vices in men of

this description is inconceivable. It spreads like a pestilence, and destroys thousands in secrecy and silence, of whom the offender himself knows nothing, and whom probably he never meant to injure; and wherever the heart is corrupted, the principle of faith is proportionably weakened; for no man that gives a loose to his passions will choose to have so troublesome a monitor near him as the Gospel. When he has learned to disregard the moral precepts of that divine volume, it requires but a very slight effort to reject its doctrines, and then to disbelieve the truth of the whole.

A dissolute life, then, especially in particular classes of men, is one certain way of making our brother to offend, not only in point of practice, but of belief; and there is another method of producing the same effects, nearly allied to this, and that is *immoral publications*.

These have the same tendency with bad examples, both in propagating vice and promoting infidelity; but they are still

more pernicious; because the sphere of their influence is more extensive.

A bad example, though it operates fatally, operates comparatively within a small circumference. It extends only to those who are near enough to observe it, and fall within the reach of the poisonous infection that spreads around it; but the contagion of a licentious publication, especially if it be (as it too frequently is) in a popular and captivating shape, knows no bounds; it flies to the remotest corners of the earth; it penetrates the obscure and retired habitations of simplicity and innocence; it makes its way into the cottage of the peasant, into the hut of the shepherd, and the shop of the mechanic; it falls into the hands of all ages, ranks, and conditions; but it is peculiarly fatal to the unsuspecting and unguarded minds of the youth of both sexes; and to them its "breath is poison, and its touch is death."

What then have *they* to answer for who are every day obtruding these publica-

tions on the world, in a thousand different shapes and forms, in history, in biography, in poems, in novels, in dramatic pieces; in all which the prevailing feature is *universal philanthropy and indiscriminate benevolence*; under the protection of which the hero of the piece has the privilege of committing whatever irregularities he thinks fit; and while he is violating the most sacred obligations, insinuating the most licentious sentiments, and ridiculing every thing that looks like religion, he is nevertheless held up as a model of virtue; and though he may perhaps be charged with a few little venial foibles, and pardonable infirmities, (as they are called) yet we are assured that he has notwithstanding *the very best heart in the world.* Thus it is that the principles of our youth are insensibly and almost unavoidably corrupted; and instead of being inspired, as they ought to be, even upon the stage, with a just detestation of vice, they are furnished with apologies for it, which they never forget, and are even taught to consider

consider it as a necessary part of an accomplished character.

And as if we had not enough of this disgusting nonsense and abominable profligacy in our own country, and in our own language, we are every day importing fresh samples of them from abroad, are ingrafting foreign immorality on our own native stock, and introducing characters on the stage, or into the closet, which are calculated to recommend the most licentious principles, and favour irregularities and attachments that deserve the severest reprehension and punishment.

These are the several modes in which we may weaken or even destroy the moral and religious principles of very sincere Christians, or, in the words of Scripture, *may make our brother to offend.* And whoever is guilty of *giving* this offence, ought most seriously to consider the heavy punishment, and the bitter woe, which our Lord here denounces against it. There is scarce any one sin noticed by him which he reprobates in such strong terms

as this: "Whoso shall *offend* one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world because of offences; for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh." These are tremendous words; but we cannot wonder that our Lord should express himself thus strongly, when we consider the dreadful consequences of spreading infidelity and immorality among our fellow-creatures. We distress them with doubts and scruples which never before entered into their thoughts; we rob them of the most invaluable blessings of life, of that heavenly consolation and support which is derived from religious sentiments and virtuous habits; of that trust and confidence in the Supreme Disposer of all things, which gives ease and comfort to the afflicted soul; of that unspeakable satisfaction which results from a conscientious discharge of our duty;

and

and of that peace of God which passeth all understanding. But what is still worse, we not only deprive them of the truest comforts of the present life, but we cut off all their hopes of happiness in the next; we take from them the only sure ground of pardon and acceptance, the death and merits of a crucified Redeemer: we bar up against them the gates of heaven, into which but for us they might have entered, and perhaps consign them over to everlasting perdition. Is not this beyond comparison the greatest injury that one human creature can inflict upon another? And does it not justly merit that severe sentence which our Lord has pronounced against it? Let then every one keep at the utmost distance from this most atrocious crime. Let every man who commits his thoughts to the public, take especial care that nothing drop even incidentally from his pen that can offend those whom our Saviour calls *little children* that believe in him; that can either stagger their faith or corrupt their hearts.

Let every father of a family be equally careful that nothing escape his lips in the unguarded hour of familiar converse, that can be dangerous to the religious principles of his children, his friends, or his servants; nothing that tends to lessen their reverence for the sacred writings, their respect for the doctrines, the precepts, or the sacred ordinances of religion, or raise any doubts or scruples in their minds respecting the truth or divine authority of the Christian revelation. I mention these things, because even the friends of religion are sometimes apt, through mere inadvertence or thoughtlessness, to indulge themselves in pleasantries, even upon serious subjects, which though meant at the time merely to entertain their hearers, or to display their wit, yet often produce a very different effect, and sink much deeper into the minds of those that are present (especially of young people) than they are in the least aware of. More mischief may sometimes be done by incidental levities of this kind, than by grave

grave discourses or elaborate writings against religion.

I have dwelt the longer on this interesting topic, because few people are aware of the enormity of the sin here reproved by our Lord, of the irreparable injury it may do to others, and of the danger to which it exposes themselves. But when they reflect, that by the commission of this crime they endanger the present peace and the future salvation of their fellow-creatures, and expose themselves to the woes which our Lord has in the passage before us denounced against those from whom these offences come, they will probably feel it their duty to be more guarded in this instance than men generally are; and will take heed to their ways, that they offend not either with their pen or with their tongue.

I now go on with the remaining part of our Lord's admonition to his disciples.

After having said in the 7th verse, "Woe unto the world because of offences; for it must needs be that offences come; but

but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh;" he then adds, "Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off and cast them from thee; it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire; and if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee; it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire."

Our Saviour here applies to the particular sin which he was then condemning, the very same words which he had used before in his sermon on the Mount with reference to the crime of adultery; and the meaning is this:

The heinous sin, against which I have been here cautioning you, that of offending your Christian brethren, of causing them by your misconduct to renounce their faith in me or to desert the paths of virtue, has its origin in your depraved appetites and passions; as in the present instance

instance it is your ambition, your eagerness after worldly honours and distinctions, which it is to be feared will give offence and scandal to those that observe it, and may impress them with an unfavourable idea of that religion which seems to inspire such sentiments. You must therefore go at once to the root of the evil, you must extirpate those corrupt passions and propensities that have taken possession of your hearts, though it may be as difficult for you to part with them as it would be to pluck out an eye, or tear off a limb from the body. For it is better that you should renounce what is most dear to you in this life, than that you should suffer those dreadful punishments in the next, which I have told you will assuredly be inflicted on all impenitent offenders, and more particularly on those who offend in the way here specified.

He then returns to the main subject of his exhortation: "take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do

do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." That is, I again repeat to you, take heed that ye treat not with scorn and contempt such little children as you now see before you, or those believers in me who resemble these children in docility, meekness, humility, and indifference to all that the world calls great and honourable. Take care that you do not consider their welfare, their salvation, as below your notice and regard, and wantonly endanger both by giving way to your own irregular desires; for I say unto you, that however contemptibly you may think of them, your heavenly Father regards them with a more favourable eye. He even condescends to take them under his protection, he sends his most favoured angels, those ministers of his that do his pleasure, and stand always in his presence ready to execute his commands, even these he deputes to guard and watch over these little children, and those humble Christians, who are like them in purity and innocence of mind.

From this passage some have inferred, that every child, and every faithful servant of Christ, has an angel constantly attached to his person, to superintend, direct, and protect him; and this is the opinion of the learned Grotius himself; whilst others only suppose that those celestial spirits, who (as we are told of Gabriel) *stand before God*, are occasionally sent to assist the pious Christian in imminent danger, in severe trials, or great emergencies. And hence perhaps the favourite and popular doctrine of *guardian angels*; a doctrine which has prevailed more or less in every age of the church, which is without question most soothing and consolatory to human nature, and is certainly countenanced by this and several other passages of holy writ, as well as by the authority of Origen, Tertullian, and other ancient fathers and commentators. In the Psalms it is said, "The angel of the Lord tarrieth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them*." And in the

* Psal. xxxiv. 7.

the Epistle to the Hebrews * we are told, "that the angels are all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." No one therefore that cherishes this notion can be charged with weakness or superstition; and if it should be at last an error, it is, as Cicero says of the immortality of the soul, so delightful an error, that we cannot easily suffer it to be wrested from us †. But whatever may be the decision of learned men on this point, there is one thing most clearly proved by the text now before us, and confirmed by a multitude of others, and that is, the doctrine not only of a general but of a particular providence, which in one way or other, whether by ministering angels, or by the all-comprehending

* Chap. i. 14.

† The excellent Bishop Andrews has, in one of his animated prayers, a passage which plainly shows that he believed this doctrine. It is as follows: "That the angel of peace, the holy guide of thy children, the faithful guard set by thee over their souls and bodies, may encamp round about me, and continually suggest to my mind such things as conduce to thy glory, grant, O good Lord!"

hending and omnipresent eye of God himself, watches over those true disciples of Christ, who, in their tempers, dispositions, and manners, approach nearest to the humility, the meekness, the innocence, and the simplicity of a child.

This doctrine is indeed so distinctly and explicitly asserted in various parts of Scripture, that it stands in no need of any confirmation from this particular passage; but every additional proof of so material a support under the afflictions and calamities of life, must be grateful to every heart that has known what affliction is.

The verse that comes next in order is this: "For the Son of man is come to save that which is lost." The connexion of this verse with the preceding one is somewhat obscure, but seems to be as follows: you may think, perhaps, that man is too mean, too insignificant a being, to be worthy of the ministration and guardianship of celestial spirits. But how can you entertain this imagination, when you know that for this creature man, for

fallen

fallen and sinful man, did the Son of God condescend to offer himself up a sacrifice on the cross, and came to save that which was lost? Well then may the angels of heaven be proud to guard what their Lord and Master came to save. Jesus then goes on to exemplify, by a familiar similitude, his paternal tenderness to the sons of men. "How think ye, if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and go into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep than of the ninety and nine that went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father that one of these little ones should perish." We are not to infer from this similitude, that God sets more value, and looks with more complacency and approbation on one repenting sinner, than on ninety and nine righteous persons who have uniformly and devoutly served him. This can never be imagined;

imagined; nor would it correspond with the illustration. The shepherd himself does not set a greater value upon the lost sheep than he does upon those that are safe; nor would he give up them to recover that which has strayed. But his joy *for the moment*, at the recovery of the lost sheep, is greater than he receives from all the rest, because he has regained that, and is sure of all the others. The whole, therefore, that was meant to be inculcated by this parable is, that God's parental tenderness extends to all, even to the sinner that goes astray, and that he rejoices at the conversion and recovery of the meanest individual, and of the most grievous offender. This is the very conclusion, and the only one which our Lord himself draws from the parable. "Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish."

Such then being the mercy of the Almighty even to his sinful creatures, our Lord goes on to intimate to his disciples,

that *they* ought also to exercise a similar lenity and forbearance towards their offending brethren. "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established; and if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican." In this passage there are evident allusions to the laws and customs of the Jews, who, for the conviction of any offender, required the testimony of at least two witnesses*; and in the case of notorious and obstinate offenders, reproved them publicly in their synagogues. But the obvious meaning in regard to ourselves is, that even against those who have ill-treated and injured us, we should not immediately proceed to extreme

* Deut. xix. 15.

extreme severity and rigour; but first try the effects of private, and gentle, and friendly admonition; if that fail, then call in two or three persons of character and reputation to add weight and authority to our remonstrances; and if that has no effect, we are then justified in bringing the offender before the proper tribunal, to be censured or punished as he deserves, avoiding all communication with him in future, except what common humanity may require even towards an enemy. These directions are evidently the dictates of that moderation, mildness, and benevolence, which characterize all our Saviour's precepts, and more particularly distinguish this chapter.

"Verily I say unto you," continues our Saviour, "whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father

which is in heaven; for where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

There is some difficulty and some difference of opinion with respect to the precise meaning of these verses; but they evidently have a reference to the case of the offender stated in the preceding verses; they are addressed exclusively to the apostles; and the most natural interpretation of them seems to be as follows: Whatever sentence of absolution or condemnation you shall in your apostolical capacity pronounce on any offender, that sentence shall be confirmed in heaven; and whatever even two of you shall ask in prayer for direction and assistance from above, in forming your judicial determinations, it shall be granted you; for where only two or three of you are gathered together in my name, and are acting under my authority and for my glory in any case of great importance, there am I in the midst of you by my Holy Spirit, to guide, direct, and sanction your proceedings.

We

We now come to one of the most interesting and most affecting parables that is to be found either in Scripture, or in any of the most admired writings of antiquity. In consequence of what our Lord had said in the course of his instructions on the subject of *injuries*, Peter came to him, and said, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" an allowance which he probably thought abundantly liberal. Jesus saith unto him, "I say not unto thee, until seven times, but until seventy times seven;" that is, this duty of forgiving injuries has no limits. However frequently you are injured, if real penitence and contrition follow the offence, a Christian is always bound to forgive. To illustrate and confirm this important duty, our Lord subjoins the following parable. "Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought to him which owed him ten thousand talents (that is,

nearly two millions, some think more than two millions, of our money). But for as much as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made." This seems a most severe penalty for insolvency; and yet it was a frequent practice among the Jews *, as we learn both from various passages of the Old Testament and from Josephus; and we are told by several intelligent travellers, that insolvency is one of the causes of slavery in Africa at this very hour. So perfectly conformable to fact and to the truth of history is every circumstance that occurs in the sacred writings. "The servant therefore fell down and worshipped him," prostrated himself at his master's feet, and in the most moving terms besought him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same

* Exod. xxii. 3. Lev. xxv. 47.

same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants which owed him an hundred pence (a very trifling sum); and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, "Pay me that thou owest." He assailed him with far greater violence and brutality than his lord had used towards himself for a debt of ten thousand talents. "And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all;" the very same supplicating attitude, the very same affecting words that he had himself made use of towards his lord; "and he would not, but went and cast him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry;" sorry for the sufferings of the unhappy debtor; sorry for the disgrace brought on human nature by the unfeeling creditor; "and they came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked ser-

vant, I forgave thee all that debt because thou desiredst me; shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors till he should pay all that was due to him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

Such is the parable of the unforgiving servant, which I am sure has not only been heard but *felt* by every one here present. It requires no comment or explanation; the bare repetition of it is sufficient: indeed it cannot be expressed in any other words than its own without impairing its beauty and its strength. Notwithstanding the frequency of its recurrence in the course of our church service, there is no one, I believe, that ever hears it without emotion and delight. Amidst so much excellence as we meet with in the Gospel, it is not easy to say what is most excellent; but if I was to select

select any one parable of our Lord's as more interesting, more affecting, coming more home to the feelings, and pressing closer on the hearts of men than any of the rest, I think it would be this. Certain it is, that in all the characters of excellence, in perspicuity, in brevity, in simplicity, in pathos, in force, it has no equal in any human composition whatever. On its beauties therefore I shall not enlarge, but on its uses and its application to ourselves, I must say a few words.

And in the first place I would observe, that the object of this parable is not only to enforce the duty of cultivating a placable disposition, but a disposition *constantly* placable, always ready to forgive the offences of our brother, however frequently he may repeat those offences. For it was immediately after our Lord had told Peter that he was to forgive his brother not merely seven times, but seventy times seven, that he added this parable to confirm that very doctrine; *therefore*, says he, is the kingdom of heaven like

like unto a certain king, &c. But then it is only upon this condition, that the offender is sincerely penitent, and entreats forgiveness. This is evident from the parallel passage in St. Luke, which expresses this condition: "If thy brother trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him *." Yet even this will to many people appear a hard saying, and will not very well agree with those high-spirited passions, and that keen sense of injuries, which too generally prevail, and which, instead of forgiving *repeated* offences, will listen to no entreaties, no expressions of contrition, even for a *single* one. But are you then content that your heavenly Father should deal out the same measure to you that you mete to your brother? Are you content that one single offence should exclude you for ever from the arms of his mercy? Are you not every day heaping up sin upon sin; do not you stand as much

* Luke xvii. 4.

much in need of daily forgiveness as you do of your daily bread; and do you think it an *excess* of indulgence, an overstrained degree of tenderness and compassion, that your Maker should pardon you seven times a day, or even seventy times seven?

2. In the next place I would remark, that this parable is a practical comment on that petition in the Lord's Prayer, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us;" and it shows what infinite stress our Divine Master lays on this duty of forgiveness, by the care he takes to enforce it in so many different ways, by this parable, by making it a part of our daily prayers, and by his repeated declarations that we must expect no mercy from our Maker, "unless we from our hearts forgive every one his brother their trespasses*." To the same purpose are those irresistible words of St. Paul: "Be ye therefore kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath

* Matt. xviii. 35.

hath forgiven you *." Let the hard-hearted unrelenting man of the world, or the obdurate unforgiving parent, advert to these repeated admonitions, and then let him, if he can, indignantly spurn from him the repenting offender entreating pardon at his feet in those heart-piercing words, "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all."

And yet it is dreadful to state, as I must do in the last place, what very little regard is paid to this precept by a large part of mankind.

No man, I believe, ever heard or read the parable before us without feeling his indignation rise against the ungrateful and unfeeling servant, who, after having a debt of ten thousand talents remitted to him by his indulgent lord, threw his fellow servant into prison for a debt of an hundred pence. And yet how frequently are we ourselves guilty of the very same offence?

Who is there among us that has not had ten

* Eph. iv. 32.

ten thousand talents forgiven him by his heavenly Father? Take together all the offences of his life, all his sins and follies from the first hour of his maturity to the present time, and they may well be compared to this immense sum; which immense sum, if he has been a sincere penitent, has been all forgiven through the merits of his Redeemer. Yet when his fellow-christian owes him an hundred pence, when he commits the slightest offence against him, he too often refuses him forgiveness, though he fall at his feet to implore it.

In fact, do we not every day see men resenting not only real injuries, but slight and even imaginary offences, with extreme vehemence and passion, and sometimes punishing the offender with nothing less than death? Do we not even see families rent asunder, and all domestic tranquillity and comfort destroyed frequently by the most trivial causes, sometimes on one side, and sometimes on both, refusing to listen to any reasonable overtures of peace, haughtily

haughtily rejecting all offers of reconciliation, insisting on the highest possible satisfaction and submission, and carrying these sentiments of implacable rancour with them to the grave? And yet these people call themselves Christians, and expect to be themselves forgiven at the throne of mercy!

Let then every man of this description remember and most seriously reflect on this parable; let him remember that the unforgiving servant was delivered over to the tormentors till he should pay the uttermost farthing. Let him recollect that all the world approves this sentence; that he himself cannot but approve it; that he cannot but feel himself to be precisely in the situation of that very servant, and that of course he must at the last tremendous day expect that bitter and unanswerable reproach from his offended Judge; "O thou wicked servant! I forgave thee all that debt because thou desiredst me; shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant even as I had pity on thee?"

LECTURE XVII.

MATTHEW XIX.

THE passage of Scripture which I propose to explain in the present Lecture, is a part of the 19th chapter of St. Matthew, beginning at the 16th verse.

"Behold," says the evangelist, "one came and said unto him (meaning Jesus), 'Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness. Honour thy father and thy mother:

mother: and, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up; what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be *perfect*, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions."

The conversation here related between the young ruler (for so he is called by St. Luke) and our blessed Lord, cannot but be extremely interesting to every sincere Christian, who is anxious about his own salvation. A young man of high rank, and of large possessions, came with great haste and eagerness; came *running*, as St. Mark expresses it, to Jesus; and throwing himself at his feet, proposed to him this most important question: "Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" This was not a question of mere curiosity, or an insidious one,

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as the questions put to our Lord (especially by the rulers) frequently were, but appears to have been dictated by a sincere and anxious wish to be instructed in the way to that everlasting life, which he found Jesus held out to his disciples. His conduct had been conformable to the precepts of that religion in which he was born and educated, the religion of Moses; for when our Lord pointed out to him the commandments he was to keep, his answer was, "All these things have I kept from my youth up; and his disposition, also, we must conclude to have been an amiable one; for we are told that Jesus *loved him*, beheld him with a certain degree of regard and affection. In this state of mind then he came to Jesus, and asked the question already stated; "Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"

Our Lord's answer was, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. The young man saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, thou

shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness. Honour thy father and thy mother: and, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." In this enumeration, it is observable that our Lord does not recite *all* the ten commandments, but only five out of those that compose what is called the second table. Now we cannot imagine that Jesus meant to say that the observation of a *few* of God's commands would put the young man in possession of eternal life. His intention unquestionably was, by a very common figure of speech, to make a part stand for the whole; and instead of enumerating *all* the commandments, to specify only a few, which were to represent the rest. "Thou shalt do no murder, thou shalt not commit adultery, and so of all the other commandments, to which my reasoning equally applies." Nor does he only include in his injunction the ten commandments, but *all* the moral commandments of God contained in the law of Moses; for he mentions one which

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is not to be found in the ten commandments; "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." This therefore points out to the young man his obligation to observe all the other moral precepts of the law. "The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up; what lack I yet?" The probability is, that he flattered himself he lacked nothing; that his obedience to the moral law rendered him *perfect*, qualified him to become a disciple and follower of Christ here, and gave him a *claim* to a superior degree of felicity hereafter. It was to repress these imaginations, which Jesus saw rising in his mind, that he gave him the following answer; an answer which struck the young man with astonishment and grief, and which some have represented as more harsh and severe than his conduct merited. "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me." In the parallel place of St. Mark,

it is, "Come and take up the cross and follow me." The meaning is, although God is pleased to accept graciously your obedience to the moral law, yet you must not flatter yourself that your obedience is *perfect*; and that this perfect obedience gives you a *right* or *claim* to eternal life; much less to a superior degree of reward in heaven; far from it. To convince you how far you fall short of *perfection*, I will put your obedience to the test, in a trying instance, and you shall then judge whether you are so perfect as you suppose yourself. You say that you have from your youth kept the moral laws delivered to you by Moses. Now one of those laws is this, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy might." If therefore you pretend to perfection, you must observe this law as well as all the rest, and consequently you must prefer his favour to every thing else; you must be ready to sacrifice to his commands every thing that is most valuable to you in this world. I

now, therefore, as a teacher sent from God, require you to sell all you have, and give to the poor, and follow me, and you shall then have treasure in heaven. The young man made no reply. He could not. He saw all his pretensions to *perfection*, his hopes of an *extraordinary* reward, vanish at once: He was not disposed to purchase even treasure in heaven at the price of all he possessed on earth. He therefore went away silent and sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

There is a question which I suppose naturally arises in every man's mind, on reading this conversation between the young ruler and Jesus. Does the injunction here given to the young man by Jesus, relate to *all* Christians in general, and are we all of us, without exception, bound to sell all that we have, and give to the poor, as a necessary condition of obtaining treasure in heaven? The answer is, most assuredly not. Our Lord's command refers solely to the individual person to whom he addressed himself, or at the

most to those who at that time became disciples of Christ. I have already shown that our Saviour's object, in giving this command to the young man, was probably to lower the high opinion he seemed to entertain of his *perfect* obedience to the laws of Moses, to convince him that he was very far from that exalted state of piety and virtue to which he pretended, and that if he was rewarded with eternal life, it must be not in consequence of his own righteousness, but of the mercy of God, and the merits of a Redeemer, as yet unknown to him.

But besides this, it is not improbable that the young ruler was ambitious to enlist under the banners of Christ, and to become one of his disciples and followers. And at that time no one could do this whose time and thoughts were engaged in worldly concerns, and in the care and management and attendant luxuries of a large fortune. Nor was this all; every man that embarked in so perilous an undertaking, did it at the risk not only of his property,

property, but even of life itself, from the persecuting spirit of the Jewish rulers. When, therefore, our Saviour says to the young man, If thou wilt be *perfect*, that is, if thou art desirous to profess the more perfect religion of the Gospel, and to become one of my followers, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and take up the cross and follow me; he only prepares him for the great hardships and dangers to which *every* follower of Christ was *then* exposed, and the necessity there was for him to sit loose to every thing most valuable in the present life.

This command, therefore, does not in its primary meaning relate to Christians of the present times; nor indeed to Christians at all, properly speaking, but to those who were at *that time* desirous of becoming so.

But though in a strict and literal sense it cannot be applied to ourselves, yet in its principle and in its general import, it conveys a most useful and most important lesson to Christians in every age and in

every nation; it is an admonition to them not to pique themselves too much on their exact obedience to all the divine commands, not to assume to themselves so much perfection, as to found upon it a *right* and a *claim* to eternal life; not to rely solely on their own righteousness, but on the merits of their Redeemer, for acceptance and salvation. It reminds them also, that they ought always to be prepared to yield an implicit obedience to the commands of their Maker; and that if their duty to him should at any time require it, they should not hesitate to renounce their dearest interests, and most favourite pleasures; to part with fame, with fortune, and even life itself; and, under all circumstances, to consider, in the first place, what it is that God requires at their hands, and to submit to it, whatever it may cost them, without a murmur.

After this conversation with the young ruler, follows the observation made by our Lord, on this remarkable incident. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, "Verily I say

say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." When his disciples heard it they were amazed, saying, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." This sentence passed upon the rich is a declaration, which, if understood literally, and as applying to *all* Christians of the present day, who may justly be called *rich*, would be truly terrifying and alarming to a very large description of men, a much larger than may at first perhaps be imagined. For by rich men must be understood, not only those of high rank and large possessions, but those in every rank of life, who have any superfluity beyond what is necessary for the decent and comfortable support of themselves and their families. These are all to be considered as *rich* in a greater or less degree, and this

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of course must comprehend a very large part of the Christian world. Does then our Lord mean to say, that it is scarce possible for such vast numbers of Christians to be saved? This does certainly at the first view seem to be implied in that very strong expression, "that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven." But it may fairly be presumed, that it was not our Lord's intention to pronounce so very severe and discouraging a sentence as this, and to render the way to heaven almost inaccessible to so very considerable a number of his disciples. And in fact, on a careful consideration of this passage, of the limitations and abatements necessary to be made in proverbial expressions and oriental idioms, and of the explanations given of it in other parts of Scripture, and even by our Lord himself, it will appear that there is nothing in it which ought to inspire terror and dismay into the heart of any sincere and real Christian, be his situation ever so exalted or affluent.

It must be observed then in the first place, what is exceedingly important in this inquiry, that, in its original application, this passage does not seem to have attached upon those who were then actually disciples of Christ, but upon those only who were desirous of becoming so: for consider only the occasion which gave rise to this reflection. It was that very incident on which we have just been commenting; that of the young rich ruler whom our Saviour exhorted to sell all that he had, and take up his cross and follow him. The young man, not relishing these conditions, instead of following Jesus, went away sorrowful, because he had great possessions. He therefore never was, as far as we know, a disciple of Christ; and it was upon this that Jesus immediately declared, that "a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven;" that is, shall hardly be induced to embrace the Christian religion; for that is frequently the signification of the *kingdom of heaven*, in Scripture. What then our Lord affirmed

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was this, that it was extremely difficult at that time, at the fist preaching of the Gospel, for any rich man to become a convert to Christianity. And this we may easily believe; for those who were enjoying all the comforts and elegancies, and luxuries of life, would not be very ready to sacrifice these, and submit to poverty, hardships, persecutions, and even death itself, to which the first converts to Christianity were frequently exposed. They would therefore generally follow the example of the rich man before us; would turn their backs on the kingdom of heaven, and go away to the world and its enjoyments. And this in fact we know to have been the case. For it was of the lower ranks of men that our Lord's disciples *principally* consisted, and we are expressly told that it was the common people chiefly that heard him gladly; and even after his death, St. Paul asserts that not many mighty, not many noble, were called. It should seem then, that the primary objects of this declaration were those rich men to whom

whom the Gospel was *then* offered, and of whom very few embraced it. And as no penal law ought to be stretched beyond its strict and literal sense, I do not conceive that we are *authorized* to apply this severe sentence to those opulent persons who now profess themselves Christians, and to say of them that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to inherit the rewards of heaven. Still, however, as the words themselves will perhaps bear such an application, it is not improbable that our Lord might have an eye to rich men in future professing Christianity, as well as to the rich men of those days, who were either Jews or Heathens. But if it *does* relate to rich Christians at all, I have no difficulty in saying, that it must be in a very qualified and mitigated sense of the words, such as shall not bar up the gates of heaven against any true believers in Christ, or inspire terror and despair, where friendly admonition was only meant.

The first thing then to be remarked is,

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that although the similitude here made use of, that of a camel passing through the eye of a needle, implies absolute impossibility, yet according to every rule of interpreting oriental proverbs (for such this is), it means only, in its application, *great difficulty*. And in this sense it was actually used both by the Jews and the Arabians; and is plainly so interpreted by our Lord, when he says that a rich man shall *hardly* enter into the kingdom of heaven.

But even in this sense the words do not apply to *all* rich men without distinction. For in the parallel place of St. Mark*, upon the disciples expressing their astonishment at our Lord's declaration, he immediately explains himself by saying, How *hard* is it for them that *trust* in riches to enter into the kingdom of heaven: and it is *after* this explanation, that the proverbial passage follows, "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven."

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* Mark x. 24.

We see then that those rich men only are meant, who *trust* in their riches, who place their whole *dependence* upon them; whose views and hopes are centered in them and them only; who place their whole happiness, not in relieving the distresses of the poor, and soothing the sorrows of the afflicted; not in acts of worship and adoration, and thanksgiving to Him from whose bounty they derive every blessing they enjoy; not in giving him their hearts, and dedicating their wealth to his glory and his service, but in amassing it without end, or squandering it without any benefit to mankind, in making it the instrument of pleasure, of luxury, of dissipation, of vice, and the means of gratifying every irregular appetite and passion without control. These are the rich men, whose salvation is represented by our Saviour to be almost impossible; and yet even with respect to these he adds: With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible; that is, although if we look to human means, to human

strength

strength alone, it seems utterly imposible that such men as these should ever repent and be saved; yet to the power of God, to the over-ruling influences of the Holy Spirit, nothing is impossible. His grace shed abroad in the heart may touch it with compunction and remorse, may awaken it to penitence, may heal all its corruptions, may illuminate, may purify, may sanctify it, may bring the most worldly-minded man to a sense of his condition, and make him transfer his trust from riches to THE LIVING GOD.

It is then to those that *trust* in riches that this denunciation of our Lord peculiarly applies; but even to *all rich men in general* it holds out this most important admonition, that their situation is at the best a situation of difficulty and danger; that their riches furnish them with so many opportunities of indulging every wayward wish, every corrupt propensity of their hearts, and spread before them so many temptations, so many incitements, so many provocations to luxury, intemperance, sensuality,

sensuality, pride, forgetfulness of God, and contempt of every thing serious and sacred, that it is sometimes too much for human nature to bear; that they have therefore peculiar need to take heed to their ways, to watch incessantly over their own conduct, to keep their hearts with all diligence, to guard the issues of life and death, and above all, to implore with unceasing earnestness and fervour that help from above, those communications of divine grace, which can alone enable them, and which will effectually enable them, to overcome the world, and to vanquish all the powerful enemies they have to contend with. They have in short their way plainly marked out to them in Scripture, and the clearest directions given them how they are to conduct themselves so as to become *partakers of everlasting life.* "Charge them (says St. Paul) that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to

enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life *."

This striking charge to the rich is pregnant with most important and wholesome counsel, and is an admirable comment on that very passage which has so long engaged our attention. It seems indeed to allude and refer to it, and points out all those distinctions which tend to explain away its seeming harshness, and ascertain its true spirit and meaning.

It cautions the rich men of the world not to *trust* in uncertain riches: the very expression made use of by our Lord, and the very circumstance which renders it so *hard* for them to enter into the kingdom of heaven. They are enjoined to place their trust in THE LIVING GOD. They are to be rich in a far brighter treasure than gold and silver, in faith and in good works;

* 1 Tim. vi. 17—19.

works; and if they are, they will "lay a good foundation against the time to come, and will *lay hold* on eternal life." This entirely does away all the terror, all the dismay, which our Lord's denunciation might tend to produce in the minds of the wealthy and the great: it proves that the way to heaven is as open to *them*, as to all other ranks and conditions of men, and it points out to them the very means by which they may arrive there. These means are, trust in the living God, dedication of themselves to his service and his glory, zeal in every good work, and more particularly the appropriation of a large part of that very wealth, which constitutes their danger, to the purposes of piety, charity, and beneficence. These are the steps by which they must, through the merits of their Redeemer, ascend to heaven. Those riches which are their natural enemies, must be converted into allies and friends. They must, as the Scripture expresses it, make to themselves "friends of the mammon of unrighteous-

ness *;" they must be rich towards God; they must turn that wealth, which is too often the cause of their perdition, into an instrument of salvation, into an *instrument* by which they may *lay hold*, as the apostle expresses it, on eternal life.

Before I quit this interesting passage, it may be of use to observe, that while it furnishes a lesson of great caution, vigilance, and circumspection to the rich, it affords also no small degree of consolation to the poor. If they are less bountifully provided than the rich, with the materials of happiness for the present life, let them however be thankful to Providence that they have fewer difficulties to contend with, fewer temptations to combat, and fewer obstacles to surmount, in their way to the life which is to come. They have fortunately no means of indulging themselves in that luxury and dissipation, those extravagancies and excesses, which sometimes disgrace the wealthy and the great; and they are preserved

* Luke xvi. 9.

preserved from many follies, imprudencies, and sins, equally injurious to present comfort and future happiness. If they are destitute of all the elegancies, and many of the conveniencies and accommodations of life, they are also exempt from those cares and anxieties which frequently corrode the heart, and perhaps more than balance the enjoyments of their superiors. The inferiority of their condition secures them from all the dangers and all the torments of ambition and pride; it produces in them generally that meekness and lowliness of mind, which is the chief constituent of a true evangelical temper, and one of the most essential qualifications for the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus having made these observations on the conduct of the young ruler, who refused to part with his wealth and follow him, Peter thought this a fair opportunity of asking our Lord what reward should be given to him and the other apostles, who had actually done what the young ruler had not the courage and the virtue

to do. Then answered Peter and said unto him, "Lo! *we* have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall *we* have therefore?" It is true the apostles had no wealth to relinquish, but what little they had they cheerfully parted with; they gave up their *all*, they took up their cross and followed Christ. Surely after such a sacrifice they might well be allowed to ask what recompence they might expect, and nothing can be more natural and affecting than their appeal to their divine Master: "Behold, *we* have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall *we* have therefore?" Our Lord felt the force and the justice of this appeal, and immediately gave them this most gracious and consolatory answer: "Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel: and every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children,

children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life."

Our translators, by connecting the word *regeneration* with the preceding words, "ye which have followed me in the regeneration," evidently supposed that word to relate to the first preaching of the Gospel, when those who heard and received it were to be regenerated, or made new creatures.

But most of the ancient fathers, as well as the best modern commentators, refer that expression to the words that follow it, "in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory;" by which is meant the day of judgment and of recompence, when all mankind shall be as it were regenerated or born again, by rising from their graves; and when, as St. Matthew tells us in the 27th chapter (making use of the very same phrase that he does here) the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory. At that solemn hour Jesus tells his apostles

that they shall also sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. This is an allusion to the custom of princes having their great men ranged around them as assessors and advisers when they sit in council or in judgment; or more probably to the Jewish sanhedrim, in which the high priest sat surrounded by the principal rulers, chief priests, and doctors of the law; and it was meant only to express, in these figurative terms, that the apostles should in the kingdom of heaven have a distinguished pre-eminence of glory and reward, and a place of honour assigned them near the person of our Lord himself.

Jesus then goes on to say, "every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life." It is plain, both from the construction of this verse, and from the express words of St. Mark in the parallel passage, that the reward here

promised to the apostles, whatever it might be, was to be bestowed in the *present world*; besides which they were to inherit everlasting life.

What then, it may be asked, is this recompence, which was to take place in the present life, and was to be a *hundred fold?* It certainly cannot be a hundred fold of those worldly advantages which are supposed to be relinquished for the sake of Christ and his religion; for a multiplication of several of these things, instead of a reward, would have been an incumbrance. And we know in fact the apostles never did abound in worldly possessions, but were for the most part destitute and poor. The recompence then here promised must have been of a very different nature; it is that internal content and satisfaction of mind, that peace of God which passeth all understanding, those delights of a pure conscience and an upright heart, that affectionate support of all good men, those consolations of the Holy Spirit, that trust and confidence in God, that consciousness

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of the divine favour and approbation, those reviving hopes of everlasting glory, which every good man and sincere Christian never fails to experience in the discharge of his duty. These are the things which will cheer his heart and sustain his spirits, amidst all the discouragements he meets with, under the pressure of want, of poverty, of affliction, of calumny, of ridicule, of persecution, and even under the terrors of death itself, which will recompense him *a hundred fold* for all the sacrifices he has made to Christ and his religion, and impart to him a degree of comfort, and tranquillity, and happiness, far beyond any thing that all the wealth and splendour of this world can bestow. That this is not a mere ideal representation, we may see in the example of those very persons to whom this discourse of our Saviour was addressed. We may see a picture of the felicity here described, drawn by the masterly hand of St. Paul, in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians: "We are, says he, (speaking of himself and his fellow-

fellow-labourers in the Gospel) we are approving ourselves in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." We have here a portrait, not merely of patience and fortitude, but of *cheerfulness and joy* under the acutest sufferings, which is no where to be met with in the writings of the most celebrated heathen philosophers. The utmost that *they* pretended to was a contempt of pain, a determination not to be subdued

subdued by it, and not even to acknowledge that it was an evil. But we never hear them expressing that cheerfulness and joy under suffering, which we here see in the apostles and first disciples of Christ. Indeed it was impossible that they should rise to these extraordinary exertions of the human mind, since they wanted all those supports which bore up the apostles under the severest calamities, and raised them above all the common weaknesses and infirmities of their nature; namely, the consciousness of being embarked in the greatest and noblest undertaking that ever engaged the mind of man, an unbounded trust and confidence in the protection of Heaven, a large participation of the divine influences and consolations of the Holy Spirit, and a firm and well grounded hope of an eternal reward in another life, which would infinitely overpay all their labour and their sorrows in this. These were the sources of that content and cheerfulness, that vigour and vivacity of mind, under the severest

severest afflictions, which nothing could depress, and which nothing but Christian philosophy could produce.

Here then we have a full explanation of our Lord's promise in the passage before us, that every one who had forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for his name's sake, should receive a hundred fold, should receive abundant recompence in the comfort of their own minds, as described in the corresponding passage of St. Paul, just cited; which may be considered not only as an admirable comment on our Lord's declaration, but as an exact fulfilment of the prediction contained in it. For that declaration is plainly prophetic; it foretells the persecution his disciples would meet with in the discharge of their duty; and foretells also, that in the midst of these persecutions they would be undaunted and joyful. And there cannot be a more perfect completion of any prophecy, than

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that which St. Paul's description sets before us with respect to this.

But we must not confine this promise of our Saviour's to his own immediate followers and disciples; it extends to all his faithful servants in every age and nation of the world, that part with any thing which is dear and valuable to them for the sake of the Gospel. Whoever has passed any time in the world, must have seen that every man who is sincere in the profession of his religion, who sets God always before him, and who seeks above all things his favour and approbation, must sometimes make great and painful sacrifices to the commands of his Maker and Redeemer; and whoever does so, whoever gives up his pleasures, his interests, his fame, his favourite pursuits, his fondest wishes, and his strongest passions, for the sake of his duty, and in conformity to the will of his heavenly Father, may rest assured, that he shall in no wise lose his reward. He shall, in a degree

degree proportioned to the self-denial he has exercised, and the sufferings he has undergone, experience the present comfort and support here promised to the apostles; and shall also, though not to the same extent, have an extraordinary recompence in the kingdom of heaven.

Let no one then be deterred from persevering in the path of duty, whatever discouragements, difficulties, or obstructions he may meet with in his progress, either from the struggles he has with his own corrupt affections, or from the malevolence of the world. Let him not fear to encounter what he must expect to meet with, opposition, contumely, contempt, and ridicule; let him not fear the enmity of profligate and unprincipled men; but let him go on undaunted and undismayed in that uniform tenour of piety and benevolence, of purity, integrity, and uprightness of conduct, which will not fail to bring him peace at the last. Let him not be surprised or alarmed if he is not exempt from the common

lot

lot of every sincere and zealous Christian; if he finds it by his own experience to be true, what an apostle of Christ had long since prepared him to expect, that whosoever will live godly in Christ Jesus shall in one way or other *suffer persecution.* But let him remember at the same time the reviving and consolatory declaration of his divine Master; "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven."

LECTURE XVIII.

MATTHEW xxii.

I NOW pass on to the twenty-second chapter of St. Matthew, in which our blessed Lord introduces the following parable:

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding, and they would not come. Again he sent forth other servants, saying, tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready; come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise; and

the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth; and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burnt up their city. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they could find, both bad and good, and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment. And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having on a wedding garment? and he was speechless. Then said the king to his servants, Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth; for many are called, but few are chosen."

The primary and principal object of

this parable is to represent, under the image of a marriage feast, the invitation given to the Jews to embrace the Gospel, their rejection of that gracious offer, the severe punishment inflicted upon them for their ingratitude and obstinacy, and the admission of the Heathens to the privileges of Christianity in their room.

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son."

That is, the dispensations of the Almighty, with respect to the Christian religion, which is called the kingdom of heaven, may be compared to the conduct of a certain king, who (as was the custom in those times, especially among the eastern nations) gave a splendid feast in consequence of his son's marriage. And in this comparison there is a peculiar propriety, because both the Jewish and the Christian covenant are frequently represented in Scripture under the similitude of a marriage contract between God

and his people *. "And he sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding, and they would not come. Again he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage." This signifies the various and repeated offers of the Gospel to the Jews; first by John the Baptist, then by our Saviour himself, then by his apostles and the seventy disciples, both before and after his ascension.

But all these gracious offers the greater part of the nation rejected with scorn. They would not come to the marriage; they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise; and the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. They not only slighted and treated with contempt the words of eternal life, and preferred the pleasures and the interests of

* See Isaiah liv. 5. Jeremiah iii. 8. Matt. xxv. 5. 2 Cor. xi. 2.

of the present life to all the joys of heaven, but they pursued, with unceasing rancour, the first preachers of the Gospel, and persecuted them even unto death.

"But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth; and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed these murderers, and burnt up their city." This points out, in the plainest terms, the Roman armies under Vespasian and Titus, which, not many years after this was spoken, besieged Jerusalem, and destroyed the city, and slaughtered an immense number of the inhabitants. This terrible devastation our Lord here predicts in general terms, as he does more particularly and minutely in the twenty-fourth chapter; and he here represents it as the judgment of God on this perverse and obstinate people for their rejection of the Christian religion, their savage treatment of the apostles and their associates, and their many other atrocious crimes. This punishment however is here, by anticipation, represented as having been inflicted during the marriage feast; though it did

not in fact take place till afterwards, till after the Gospel had been for some time promulgated.

"Then said he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good; and the wedding was furnished with guests."

It may be thought, perhaps, at the first view, that our Lord has here introduced a circumstance not very natural or probable. It may be imagined that at a magnificent royal entertainment, if any of the guests happened to fail in their attendance, a great king would never think of supplying their places by sending his servants into the highways to collect together all the travellers and strangers they could meet with, and make them sit down at the marriage feast. But strange as this may seem, there is something that approaches

proaches very near to it in the customs of the eastern nations, even in modern times. For a traveller of great credit and reputation, Dr. Pococke, informs us, that an Arab prince will often dine in the street before his door, and call to all that pass, even to beggars, in the name of God, and they come and sit down to table; and when they have done, retire with the usual form of returning thanks *.

This adds one more proof to the many others I have already pointed out in the course of these Lectures, of the exact correspondence of the various facts and circumstances recorded in the Sacred Writings to the truth of history, and to ancient oriental customs and manners.

This part of the parable alludes to the calling in of the Gentiles or Heathens to the privileges of the Gospel, after they had been haughtily rejected by the Jews. This was first done by St. Peter, in the instance of Cornelius, and afterwards extended to the

* Pococke, vol. i. pp. 57 and 182. See also Diod. Sic. l. xiii. pp. 375, 376.

the Gentiles at large by him and the other apostles, conformably to what our Lord declares in another place: "Many shall come from the east and from the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God; but the children of the kingdom (that is, the Jews) shall be shut out*." And in this gracious invitation, no exceptions, no distinctions, were to be made. The servants gathered together *all* as many as they found, both *bad* and *good*; men of all characters and descriptions were to have the offers of mercy and salvation made to them, even the very worst of sinners; for it was these chiefly that our Saviour came to call to repentance; "for they that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick†:" and of these, great numbers did actually embrace the gracious offers made to them; for our Lord told the Jews, "the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you‡."

In this manner was the wedding furnished with

* Matt. viii. 11. † Ib. ix. 12. ‡ Ib. xxi. 31.

with guests. "And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment; and he said unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment? and he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth: for many are called, but few are chosen."

In order to understand this part of the parable, it must be observed, that among the ancients, especially in the east, every one that came to a marriage feast was expected to appear in a handsome and elegant dress, which was called the WEDDING GARMENT. This was frequently a white robe; and where the guest was *a stranger*, or was not able to provide such a robe, it was usual for the master of the feast to furnish him with one; and if he who gave the entertainment was of high rank and great opulence, he sometimes provided marriage robes for the whole assembly.

To

To this custom we have allusions in Homer, and other classic writers *; and there are some traces of it in the entertainments of the Turkish court at this very day †. It must be remarked also, that it was in a very high degree indecorous and offensive to good manners, to intrude into the festivity without this garment; hence the indignation of the king against the bold intruder who dared to appear at the marriage feast without the nuptial garment. "He was cast into outer darkness;" he was driven away from the blaze and splendour of the gay apartments within, to the darkness and gloom of the street, where he was left to unavailing grief and remorse for the offence he had committed, and the enjoyments he had lost.

This man was meant to be the representative of those presumptuous persons who intrude themselves into the Christian covenant, and expect to receive all the privileges

* Odyss. viii. 402. Diod. Sic. l. xiii. pp. 375, 376.

† At the entertainment given by the grand vizier to Lord Elgin and his suite, in the palace of the seraglio, pelisses were given to all the guests.

privileges and all the rewards annexed to it, without possessing any one of those Christian graces and virtues which the Gospel requires from all those who profess to believe and to embrace it. Nothing is more common in Scripture than to represent the *habits* and *dispositions* of the mind, those which determine and distinguish the whole character, under the figure of bodily garments and external habits. Thus Job says of himself, "I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgment was as a robe and a diadem*." And again in Isaiah it is said, "He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation; he hath covered me with a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with jewels†." In the same manner we are commanded in the Gospel to *put on* charity, to *be clothed* with humility; and in the book of Revelation‡, the elders are described as sitting before the throne of God, clothed in *white raiment*. And in the nineteenth

* Job xxix. 14. † Isa. lxi. 10. ‡ Ch. iv. 4.

nineteenth chapter there is a passage, which is a clear and beautiful illustration of that now before us: "The marriage of the Lamb is come; and to her (that is, to the church) was granted, that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white;" and this fine linen, we are expressly told, is the *righteousness of saints.* "And he saith unto me, Write, blessed are they which are called to the *marriage supper of the Lamb;*" that is, of Christ the king *. This is a plain allusion to the parable before us; and most evidently shows, that the man without the wedding garment is every man that is not clothed with *the robe of righteousness*; every man that pretends to be a Christian, without possessing the true evangelical temper and disposition of mind, without the virtues of a holy life; every one that expects to be saved by Christ, yet regards not the conditions on which that salvation depends; every profane, every unjust, every dissolute man; every one, in short, that presumes

* Rev. xix. 7, 8, 9.

presumes to say, "Lord, Lord, yet doeth not the will of his Father which is in Heaven*." All these shall be excluded from the marriage feast, from the privileges of the Gospel, and the joys of heaven, and shall be cast into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth; for many, we are told, are called, but few are chosen; that is, many are *called upon* and *invited* to embrace the Gospel; but few, comparatively speaking, receive it, or at least conduct themselves in a manner suitable to their high and heavenly calling, so as to be *chosen* or deemed worthy to inherit the kingdom of heaven.

I have only to observe further on this parable, that although in its primary intention it relates solely to the Jews, yet it has, like many other of our Lord's parables, a secondary reference to persons of every denomination in every age and nation, who, through indolence, prejudice, vanity, pride, or vice, reject the Christian revelation;

* Matt. vii. 21.

revelation; or who, professing to receive it, live in direct opposition to its doctrines and its precepts. The same future punishment which is denounced against the unbelieving or hypocritical Jews, will be with equal severity inflicted on *them*.

After Jesus had delivered this parable, the Pharisees, perceiving plainly that it was directed against them principally, were highly incensed, and determined to take their revenge, and endeavour to bring him into difficulty and danger by ensnaring questions. "Then went the Pharisees and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk. And they sent out unto him their disciples, with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth; neither carest thou for any man, for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us, therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar, or not? But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Show me the tribute-money;

money; and they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Cæsar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's. When they heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way." In order to understand the insidious nature of the question here proposed to Jesus, it must be observed, that the Jews were at this time, as they had been for many years, under the dominion of the Romans; and as an acknowledgment of their subjection, paid them an annual tribute in money. The Pharisees however were adverse to the payment of this tribute; and contended, that being the peculiar people of God, and he their only rightful sovereign, they ought not to pay tribute to any foreign prince whatever; they considered themselves as subjects of the Almighty, and released from all obedience to any foreign power. There were many

others

others who maintained a contrary opinion, and it was a question much agitated among different parties. Who the Herodians were that accompanied the Pharisees, and what their sentiments were on this subject, is very doubtful: nor is it a matter of any moment. It is plain from their name that they were in some way or other attached to Herod: and as he was a friend to the Roman government, they probably maintained the propriety of paying the tribute *.

In this state of things both the Pharisees and Herodians came to Jesus, and after some flattering and hypocritical compliments to his love of truth, his intrepidity, impartiality, and disregard to power and greatness (calculated evidently to spirit him up to some bold and offensive declaration of his opinion) they put this question to him; "Is it lawful to give tribute

* Those whom St. Mark calls the *Leaven of Herod*, c. viii. 15. St. Matthew, in the parallel passage, xvi. 5. calls Sadducees. Hence, perhaps, we may infer, that the Herodians and the Sadducees were the same persons.

tribute to Cæsar, or not?" They were persuaded, that in answering this question, he must either render himself odious to the Jewish people, by opposing their popular notions of liberty, and appearing to pay court to the emperor; or, on the other hand, give offence to that prince, and expose himself to the charge of sedition and disaffection to the Roman government, by denying their right to the tribute they had imposed. They conceived it impossible for him to extricate himself from this dilemma, or to escape danger on one side or the other; and perhaps no other person but himself could have eluded the snare that was laid for him. But he did it completely; and showed on this occasion, as he had done on many others, that presence of mind and readiness of reply to difficult and unexpected questions, which is one of the strongest proofs of superior wisdom, of a quick discernment, and a prompt decision. He pursued, in short, the method which he had adopted in similar instances; he

compelled the Jews in effect to answer the question themselves, and to take from him all the odium attending the determination of it. He perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why tempt ye me? Why do you try to ensnare me, ye hypocrites? Shew me the tribute-money. And they brought unto him a penny (a small silver coin of the Romans, called a denarius). And he said unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? And they say unto him, Cæsar's." By admitting that this was Cæsar's coin, and by consenting to receive it as the current coin of their country, they in fact acknowledged their subjection to his government. For the right of coinage, and of issuing the coin, and giving value and currency to it, is one of the highest prerogatives and most decisive marks of sovereignty: and it was a tradition of their own rabbins, that to admit the impression and the inscription of any prince on their current coin, was an acknowledgment of their subjection to him. And it was more particularly so

in the present instance, because we are told that the denarius paid by the Jews as tribute-money had an inscription round the head of Cæsar, to this effect; *Cæsar Augustus, Judæa being subdued* *. To pay this coin with this inscription, was the completest acknowledgment of subjection, and of course of their obligation to pay the tribute demanded of them, that could be imagined. Our Lord's decision therefore was a necessary consequence of their own concession. "Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's (which you yourselves acknowledge to be Cæsar's) and unto God the things that are God's." And when they heard these words, they marvelled; they were astonished at his prudence and address; and left him, and went their way.

But in this answer of our Saviour is contained a much stronger proof of his consummate wisdom and discretion than has yet been mentioned. He not only disengaged himself from the difficulties

* See Hammond, in loc.

in which the question was meant to involve him, but, without entering into any political discussions, he laid down two doctrines of the very last importance to the peace and happiness of mankind, and the stability of civil government. He made a clear distinction between the duties we owe to God, and the duties we owe to our earthly rulers. He showed that they did not, in the smallest degree, interfere or clash with each other; and that we ought never to refuse what is justly due to Cæsar, under pretence of its being inconsistent with what we owe to our Maker.

On the contrary, he lays down this as a general fundamental rule of his religion, that we ought to pay obedience to LAWFUL AUTHORITY, and submit to that acknowledged and established government under which we live. The Jews had for a hundred years acknowledged their subjection, and paid their tribute to the Roman government; and our Lord's decision therefore was, "Render unto Cæsar

Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's." It is true that the tyrant Tiberius was then emperor of Rome, but the Jews alleged no particular grievance or act of oppression to justify their refusal of tribute; and our Lord had no concern with any peculiar form of government. His decision would have been the same had the Roman republic then existed. His doctrine was obedience to lawful authority, in whatever shape that authority might be exercised. If it be contended that there may be extraordinary cases of extreme and intolerable tyranny, which burst asunder at once the bonds of civil subordination, and justify resistance; the answer is, that these were considerations into which the divine Founder of our religion did not think it wise or expedient to enter. He left them to be decided (as they always must be) at the moment, by the pressing exigencies and peculiar circumstances of the case, operating on the common feelings and common sense of mankind. His great object was to lay down one broad

fundamental rule, which, considered as a general and leading principle, would be most conducive to the peace, the comfort, and the security of mankind; and that rule most indisputably is the very doctrine which he inculcated; OBEDIENCE TO LAWFUL AUTHORITY AND ESTABLISHED GOVERNMENT. In perfect conformity to his sentiments, the apostles held the same language after his death. "Submit yourselves, says St. Peter, to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake; whether it be unto the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well *." "Be subject to principalities and powers, says St. Paul, and *obey magistrates* †. Ye must needs be subject not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake ‡. Render therefore to all, their dues, tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour §."

Here

* 1 Peter ii. 13, 14. † Tit. iii. 1.
‡ Rom. xiii. 5. § Rom. xiii. 7.

Here then we see the whole weight of the Gospel, and of its divine Author, thrown into the scale of lawful authority. Here we see that the Christian religion comes in as a most powerful auxiliary to the civil magistrate, and lends the entire force of its sanctions to the established government of every country; an advantage of infinite importance to the peace and welfare of society. And happy had it been for mankind, if in this, as in every other instance, they had conformed to the directions of the Gospel, instead of indulging their own wild projects and destructive theories of resistance to civil government, and the subversion of the most ancient and venerable institutions. Happy had it been for the Jews in particular, if they had adopted our Saviour's advice; for by acting contrary to it, by breaking out as they did soon after into open rebellion against the Romans, they plunged themselves into a most cruel and sanguinary war, which ended in the entire overthrow of their city, their temple, and

their government, and the destruction of vast multitudes of the people themselves. Similar calamities have, we know, in other countries, arisen from similar causes; from a contempt of all legitimate authority, and a direct opposition to those sage and salutary precepts of the Gospel, which are no less calculated to preserve the peace, tranquillity, security, and good order of civil society, than to promote the individual happiness of every human being, here and for ever.

The Pharisees having been thus completely foiled in their attempt to ensnare and entangle our Saviour in his talk, the next attempt made upon him was by a different set of men, the Sadducees, who disbelieved a resurrection, a future state, and the existence of the soul after death. And their object was to show the absurdity and the falsehood of these doctrines, by stating a difficulty respecting them, which they conceived to be insuperable. The difficulty was this: "The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there

there is no resurrection, and asked him, saying, Master, Moses said, if a man die having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh: and last of all the woman died also: therefore in the resurrection, whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her. Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God; for in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

This answer of our Saviour's has by some

some been thought to be obscure, and not to go directly to the point of proving a resurrection, which the Sadducees denied, and which their objection was meant to overthrow. In our Lord's reply no argument seems to be advanced, nor any plain text of Scripture produced to establish the doctrine of a resurrection of the body, and its reanimation by the soul. It is only contended, that as God declares himself to be the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the souls of those persons must still be in existence in a separate state; because God could not be said to be the God of those who were no longer in being. This is undeniable. But how (it is said) does this prove a resurrection? To explain this, it must be observed, that Christ's answer consists of two parts: in the first, he solves the difficulty started by the Sadducees respecting a resurrection, by telling them that it arose entirely from their not attending to the power of God, which could effect with the utmost ease what to them appeared impossible;

and

and from their ignorance of the state of human beings in heaven, which resembled that of angels, and required not a constant succession to be kept up by marriage. The case therefore they had stated respecting the marriage of the seven brethren with one woman was a very unfortunate one, because it happened that in heaven there would be no such thing as marriage; which destroyed at once the whole of that objection which they deemed so formidable. In the second part he completely subverts the false principle on which their disbelief of a resurrection and a future state was entirely founded. This principle was, that the soul had no separate existence, but fell into nothing at the dissolution of its union with the body. This we learn from the Acts of the Apostles*, where it is said, "that the Sadducees believe neither angel nor spirit;" and from Josephus, who tells us, that the Sadducees held that the soul *vanishes* (as he expresses it) with the body, and

* Chap. xxiii. 8.

and rejected the doctrine of its duration after death*. It was this principle therefore which our Saviour undertook to overthrow, which he does effectually in the 31st and 32d verses, by showing it to be a clear inference from the words of Scripture †, that although the bodies of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, had long been in their graves, yet their souls had survived, and were at that moment in existence. From hence it necessarily followed that the soul did not perish with the body, as the Sadducees believed, but that it continued in being after death; and at the general resurrection would be again united with the body, and live for ever in a future state of happiness or of misery.

But though arguments may be confuted, and absurdities exposed, the thorough-paced caviller is not easily silenced. One should have thought that the disgraceful failure of so many attempts to surprise and

* Συναφανιζει τοις σωμασι. Antiq. l. xviii. c. 2. p. 793. Ed. Huds.

† Exod. iii. 6.

and ensnare Jesus, would have taught his adversaries a little modesty and a little prudence; but these are qualities with which professed disputers and sophists do not usually much abound. When therefore the Pharisees had heard that Jesus had put the Sadducees to silence, instead of being discouraged from making any more experiments of that nature, *they were gathered together*, probably to consult how they might renew their attacks upon him with more success. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

The question here proposed to Jesus by the lawyer, or interpreter of the Mosaic law,

law, took its rise probably from a maxim, which seems to have been received among the Scribes and Pharisees as a first principle, namely, that such a multiplicity of precepts as the law contained was too great for any one to observe; and therefore all that could be required was, that each should select to himself one or two great and important duties, on account of which, if inviolably observed, his transgressions in other respects would be overlooked. But then immediately arose a question, Which *were* these great and important duties that ought to have the preference to all the rest, and on which they might securely ground all their merit and all their pretences to the favour of God? And on this question a variety of sects were formed, under their respective leaders, who disputed about the *chief duty* much in the same manner as the ancient pagan philosophers did about the *chief good*; and exactly with the same benefit to themselves and to the world.

It was with a reference therefore to these disputes,

disputes, which were so warmly agitated among the Pharisees, that the lawyer asked our Lord, "which was the great commandment of the law?" Our Saviour's answer was, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment." He decided therefore immediately in favour of the moral law, and yet with his usual prudence did not neglect the ceremonial: for this very commandment of *the love of God* was written upon their phylacteries.

This, then, being declared by our Saviour himself to be the *first* of the commandments, must be considered by every Christian as standing at the head of the evangelical code of laws which he is bound to obey, and as entitled therefore to his first and highest regard. He is to love the Lord his God "with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his mind:" and the chief test by which the Gospel orders us to try and measure our love to God is, the regard we pay to his commands.

mands. "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, says our Lord, he it is that loveth me *." St. John in still stronger terms assures us, that "whoso keepeth God's word, in him verily is the love of God *perfected* †." The love of our Maker, then, is neither a mere unmeaning animal fervour, nor a lifeless, formal worship or obedience. It consists in devoutness of heart as well as purity of life: and from comparing together the different passages of Scripture relating to it, we may define it to be such a reverential admiration of God's perfections in general, and such a grateful sense of his infinite goodness in particular, as render the contemplation and the worship of him delightful to us, and produce in us a constant desire and endeavour to please him in every part of our moral and religious conduct.

This is, in a few words, what the Scriptures mean by the love of God, and what our Lord here calls the FIRST AND GREAT COMMAND-

* John xiv. 21. † 1 John ii. 5.

COMMANDMENT. It is justly so called for various reasons: because he who is the object of it is the first and greatest of all beings, and therefore the duties owing to him must have the precedence and pre-eminence over every other; because it is the grand leading principle of right conduct, the original source and fountain from which all Christian graces flow, from whence the living waters of religion take their rise, and branch out into all the various duties of human life: because, in fine, it is, when fervent and sincere, the grand master-spring of human conduct; the only motive sufficiently powerful to subdue our strongest passions, to carry us triumphantly through the severest trials, and render us superior to the most formidable temptations.

Next to this in order and in excellence, or, as our Saviour expresses it, *like* unto it, is that other divine command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

By the word neighbour is here to be understood, every man with whom we

have any concern; every one who stands in need of our kindness, and to whom we are able to extend it: which includes not only our relations, friends, and countrymen, but even our enemies; as appears from the parable of the good Samaritan. The precept therefore requires us *generally* to love our fellow creatures as we do ourselves.

To this it has been objected, that the precept is impracticable and impossible. Self-love, it is contended, is a passion implanted in our breasts by the hand of God himself; and though social love is also another affection which he has given us, yet there is no comparison between the strength of the two principles; and no man can or does love all mankind as well as he does himself. It is perfectly true; nor does the precept before us require it. The words are not, thou shalt love thy neighbour as *much as thyself*, but thou shalt love thy neighbour *as* thyself, that is, thou shalt entertain for him an affection similar in *kind*, though not equal in

in *degree*, to that which thou entertainest for thyself. Our self-love prompts us to seek our own happiness, as far as is consistent with the duties we owe to God and to man. Our social love should in the same manner prompt us to seek the happiness of our neighbour, as far as is consistent with the duty we owe to God and ourselves. But in all *equal* circumstances our love for ourselves must have a priority in *degree* to the love we have for our neighbour. If, for instance, my neighbour is in extreme want of food, and I am in the same want, I am not bound to give him that food which is indispensably necessary for my own preservation, but that only which is consistent with it. The rule, in short, can never be mistaken by any man of common sense. Our business is to take care to carry it far enough: nature will take sufficient care that we do not carry it too far. It is in fact nothing more than what we are taught by another divine rule very nearly allied to this, and which all men allow to

be reasonable, equitable, and practicable; "whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them*."

This is precisely what is meant by loving our neighbour as ourselves: for when we treat him exactly as we would expect and hope to be treated by him in the same circumstances, we give a clear and decisive proof that we love him *as* ourselves. And in this there is evidently no impossibility, no difficulty, no obscurity.

These then are the two great commandments, on which we are told *hang all the law and the prophets*; that is, on them, as on its main foundation, rests the whole Mosaic dispensation; for of *that*, not of the Gospel, our Lord is here speaking. To explain, establish, and confirm these two leading principles of human duty, was one of the chief objects of the law and the prophets. But it must at the same time be remembered (as I have shown at large in a former Lecture †) that, great and important as these two precepts confessedly

* Matt. vii. 12. † Lect. VII. pp. 216, 217.

fessedly are, they do by no means constitute the whole of the *Christian system*. In that we find many essential improvements of the moral law, which was carried by our Saviour to a much higher degree of perfection than in the Jewish dispensation, as may be seen more particularly in his Sermon on the Mount. We find also in the New Testament all those important evangelical doctrines which distinguish the Christian revelation; more particularly those of a resurrection, of a future day of retribution, of the expiation of our sins, original and personal, by the sacrifice of Christ, of sanctification by the Holy Spirit, of justification by a true and lively faith in the merits of our Redeemer. If therefore we wish to form a just and correct idea of the whole Christian dispensation, and if we wish to be considered as genuine disciples of our divine Master, we must not content ourselves with observing only the two leading commandments of love to God and love to men, but we must look to the *whole*

of our religion as it lies in the Gospel; we must endeavour to stand perfect in *all* the will of God, and in *all* the doctrines of his Son, as declared in the Christian revelation; and after doing our utmost to fulfil all righteousness, and to attend to every branch of our duty, both with respect to God, our neighbour, and ourselves, we must finally repose all our hopes of salvation on the merits of our Redeemer, and on our belief in him as the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

I must now put a period to these Lectures for the present season; and if it should please God to preserve my life for another year, I hope to finish my observations on the Gospel of St. Matthew; beyond which I must not now extend my views.

In the meanwhile, from what I have observed in the progress of these Lectures, I cannot help indulging an humble hope that they have not been unattended with some salutary effects upon your minds. But when, on the other hand, I consider

that

that the time of year is now approaching, in which the gaieties and amusements of this vast metropolis are generally engaged in with incredible alacrity and ardour, and multitudes are pouring in from every part of the kingdom to take their share in them; and when I recollect further, that at this very period in the last year a degree of extravagance and wildness in pleasure took place, which gave pain to every serious mind, and was almost unexampled in any former times; I am not, I confess, without some apprehensions, that the same scene of levity and dissipation may again recur; and that some of those who now hear me (of the younger part more especially) may be drawn too far into this fashionable vortex, and lose, in that giddy tumult of diversion, all remembrance of what has passed in this sacred place. I must therefore most earnestly caution them against these fascinating allurements, and recommend to them that moderation, that temperance, that modesty in amusement, which their

Christian profession at all times requires; but for which at this moment there are reasons of peculiar weight and force *.

To indulge ourselves in endless gaieties and expensive luxuries, at a time when so many of our poorer brethren are, from the heavy pressure of unfavourable circumstances, in want of the most essential necessaries of life, would surely manifest a very unfeeling and unchristian disposition in ourselves, and would be a most cruel and wanton aggravation of their sufferings.

It is true, indeed, that their wants have hitherto been relieved with a liberality and kindness, which reflect the highest honour on those who exercised them. But the evil in question still subsists in its full force, and is, I fear, more likely to increase than to abate for months to come, and will of course require unceasing exertions of benevolence, and repeated acts

* This Lecture was given in April 1800, a time of great scarcity and extreme dearness of all the necessaries of life.

acts of charity on our part, to alleviate and mitigate its baneful effects.

Every one ought therefore to provide as ample a fund as possible for this purpose: and how can this be better provided than by a retrenchment of our expensive diversions, our splendid assemblies, and luxurious entertainments? We are not *now* required, as the young ruler in the Gospel was, to sell all we have, and give to the poor; but we are required, especially in times such as these, to cut off all idle and needless articles of profusion, that we "may have to give to him that needeth."

And when we consider that the expence of a single evening's amusement, or a single convivial meeting, would give support and comfort perhaps to twenty wretched families, pining in hunger, in sickness, and in sorrow, can we so far divest ourselves of all the tender feelings of our nature (not to mention any higher principle), can we be so intolerably selfish, so wedded to pleasure, so devoted to our own gratification, as to let the lowest of

our

our brethren perish while we are solacing ourselves with every earthly delight? No one that gives himself leave to reflect for a moment, can think this to be right, can maintain it to be consistent with his duty either to God or man. And, even in respect to the very object we so eagerly pursue, and are so anxious to obtain, in point even of pleasure, I mean, and self-gratification, I doubt much whether the giddiest votary of amusement can receive half the real satisfaction from the gayest scenes of dissipation he is immersed in, that he would experience (if he would but try) from rescuing a fellow-creature from destruction, and lighting up an afflicted and fallen countenance with joy.

Let us then abridge ourselves of a few indulgences, and give the price of what they would cost us to those who have none. By this laudable species of œconomy, we shall at once improve ourselves in a habit of self-denial and self-government; we shall demonstrate the sincerity of our love to our fellow-creatures, by

by giving up *something* that is dear to us for their sake, by sacrificing our pleasures to their necessities; and, above all, we shall approve ourselves as faithful servants in the sight of our Almighty Sovereign; we shall give some proof of our gratitude to our heavenly Benefactor and Friend, who has given us richly all things to enjoy; and who, in return for that bounty, expects and commands us to be rich in good works, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to comfort the sick, to visit the fatherless and widow in their affliction, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world, unpolluted by its vices, and unsubdued by its predominant vanities and follies.

LECTURE XIX.

MATTHEW xxiv.

THIS course of Lectures for the present year will begin with the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew; which contains one of the clearest and most important prophecies that is to be found in the sacred writings.

The prophecy is that which our blessed Lord delivered respecting the destruction of Jerusalem, to which, I apprehend, the whole of the chapter, in its *primary* acceptation, relates. At the same time it must be admitted, that the forms of expression, and the images made use of, are for the most part applicable also to the day of judgment; and that an allusion to that great event, as a kind of secondary

object, runs through almost every part of the prophecy. This is a very common practice in the prophetic writings, where two subjects are frequently carried on together, a principal and a subordinate one. In Isaiah there are no less than three subjects, the restoration of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity, the call of the Gentiles to the Christian covenant, and the redemption of mankind by the Messiah, which are frequently adumbrated under the same figures and images, and are so blended and interwoven together, that it is extremely difficult to separate them from each other*. In the same manner our Saviour, in the chapter before us, seems to hold out the destruction of Jerusalem, which is his principal subject, as a type of the dissolution of the world, which is the under-part of the representation. By thus judiciously mingling together these two important catastrophes, he gives at the same time (as he does in many other instances) a most interesting admonition

* Bishop Lowth, on Isaiah lii. 13.

admonition to his immediate hearers the Jews, and a most awful lesson to all his future disciples; and the benefit of his predictions, instead of being confined to one occasion, or to one people, is by this admirable management extended to every subsequent period of time, and to the whole Christian world.

After this general remark, which is a sort of key to the whole prophecy, and will afford an easy solution to several difficulties that occur in it, I shall proceed to consider distinctly the most material parts of it.

We are told in the first verse of this chapter, that "on our Saviour's departing from the temple, his disciples came to him to shew him the buildings of it;" that is, to draw his attention to the magnitude, the splendour, the apparent solidity and stability of that magnificent structure. It is observable that they advert particularly to the *stones* of which it was composed. In St. Mark their expression is, "See what manner of *stones*, and what buildings

buildings are here;" and in St. Luke they speak of the *goodly stones and gifts* with which it was adorned. This seems at the first view a circumstance of little importance; but it shows in a very strong light with what perfect fidelity and minute accuracy every thing is described in the sacred writings. For it appears from the historian Josephus, that there was scarce any thing more remarkable in this celebrated temple than the stupendous size of the stones with which it was constructed. Those employed in the foundations were forty cubits, that is, above sixty feet in length; and the superstructure, as the same historian observes, was worthy of such foundations, for there were stones in it of the whitest marble, upwards of sixty-seven feet long, more than seven feet high, and nine broad *.

It was therefore not without reason that the disciples particularly noticed the uncommon magnitude of the stones of this superb

* Josephus de Bell. Jud. l. x. c. 5.

superb temple, from which, and from the general solidity and strength of the building, they probably flattered themselves, and meant to insinuate to their divine Master, that this unrivalled edifice was built for eternity, was formed to stand the shock of ages, and to resist the utmost efforts of human power to destroy it. How astonished then and dismayed must they have been at our Saviour's answer to these triumphant observations of theirs! Jesus said unto them, "See ye not all those things? Verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here one *stone* upon another that shall not be thrown down." This is a proverbial expression, used on other occasions, to denote *entire destruction*; and therefore had the temple been reduced to ruins in the usual way, the prophecy would have been fully accomplished. But it so happened that this prediction was almost *literally* fulfilled, and that in reality scarce one stone was left upon another. For when the Romans had taken Jerusalem, Titus ordered his soldiers to dig up the

the foundations both of the city and the temple*. The Jewish writers also themselves acknowledge, that Terentius Rufus, who was left to command the army, did with a ploughshare tear up the foundations of the temple†; and thereby fulfilled that prophecy of Micah‡, "Therefore shall Zion for your sake be ploughed as a field." And in confirmation of this remarkable circumstance, Eusebius also assures us, that the temple was ploughed up by the Romans; and that he himself saw it lying in ruins§. The evangelist next informs us, that as Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives, which was exactly opposite to the hill on which the temple was built, and commanded a very fine view of it from the east, his disciples came unto him privately, saying, "Tell us when shall these things be, and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" The expressions here made use of, *the sign of thy*

* Joseph. de Bello Jud. l. vii. c. i. p. 170. B.
† See Whitby, in loc. ‡ Chap. iii. 12.
§ Euseb. Dem. Evang. l. vi. 13.

thy coming, and *the end of the world*, at the first view naturally lead our thoughts to the coming of Christ at the day of judgment, and the final dissolution of this earthly globe. But a due attention to the parallel passages in St. Mark and St. Luke, and a critical examination into the real import of those two phrases in various parts of Scripture, will soon convince a careful inquirer, that by *the coming of Christ* is here meant, not his coming to judge the world at the last day, but his coming to execute judgment upon Jerusalem *; and that by *the end of the world* is to be understood, not the final consummation of all things here below, but the end of *that age*, the end of the Jewish state and polity, the subversion of their city, temple, and government †.

The

* See Mark xiii. 4. Luke xxi. 7. Matt. xxiv. 4, 5; xvi. 28. John xxi. 22.

† The word αιων (here translated the world) frequently means nothing more than *an age*, a certain definite period of time. See Matt. xxiv. 6. 14. Mark xiii. 7. Luke xxi. 9. compared with ver. 20. Hebrews ix. 26.

The real questions therefore here put to our Lord by the disciples were these two:

1st. At what time the destruction of Jerusalem was to take place; "Tell us when shall these things be?"

2dly. What the signs were that were to precede it; "What shall be the sign of thy coming?"

Our Lord in his answer begins first with the *signs*, of which he treats from the 4th to the 31st verse inclusive.

The first of these *signs* is specified in the 5th verse, "Many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many."

This part of the prophecy began soon to be fulfilled; for we learn from the ancient writers, and particularly from Josephus, that not long after our Lord's ascension, several impostors appeared, some pretending to be the Messiah, and others to foretel future events. The first were those whom our Lord here says *should come in his name*, and were therefore *false Christs*. The others are alluded to in the eleventh

verse, under the name of *false prophets*: "Many false prophets shall arise, and shall deceive many." Of the first sort were, as Origen informs us *, one Dositheus, who said that he was the Christ foretold by Moses; and Simon Magus, who said he appeared among the Jews as the Son of God; besides several others alluded to by Josephus †.

The same historian tells us, that there were many *false prophets*, particularly an Egyptian, who collected together above thirty thousand Jews, whom he had deceived ‡; and Theudas a magician, who said he was a prophet, and deceived many; and a multitude of others, who deluded the people, even to the last, with a promise of help from God. And in the reign of Nero, when Felix was procurator of Judæa, such a number of these impostors made their appearance, that many of them were seized and put to death every day §.

The

* Origen: Adv. Cels. l. 1. & 6.
† De Bell. Jud. l. i. p. 705.
‡ Jos. Antiq. l. xx. c. 6. and c. 4. s. 1. Ed. Huds.
§ Ib. c. 7. s. 5. p. 892.

The next signs pointed out by our Lord are these that follow: "Ye shall hear of wars, and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet: for nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places: all these are the beginning of sorrows."

That there were in reality great disturbances and commotions in those times, that there were not only rumours of wars, but wars actually existing, and continued dissensions, insurrections, and massacres among the Jews, and other nations who dwelt in the same cities with them, is so fully attested by all the historians of that period, but more particularly by Josephus, that to produce all the dreadful events of that kind which he enumerates, would be to transcribe a great part of his history. It is equally certain, from the testimony of the same author, as well as from Eusebius, and several profane historians, that there

were famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places. It is added in the parallel place by St. Luke *, "that fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven." And accordingly Josephus, in the preface to his history of the Jewish war, and in the history itself, enumerates a great variety of astonishing signs and prodigies, which he says preceded the calamities that impended over the Jews, and which he expressly affirms, in perfect conformity to our Saviour's prediction, were signs manifestly intended to forebode their approaching destruction †. And these accounts are confirmed by the Roman historian Tacitus, who says that many prodigies happened at that time; armies appeared to be engaging in the sky, arms were seen glittering in the air, the temple was illuminated with flames issuing from the clouds, the doors of the temple suddenly burst open, and a voice more than human was

* Luke xxi. 11.

† Jos. Procem. sect. 11. p. 957. De Bell. Jud. l. vi. c. 5. s. 3. p. 1281-2. & l. vii. c. 30.

was heard, "that the gods were departing;" and soon after, a great motion, as if they *were* departing*.

The sign next specified by our Saviour, in the ninth and the four following verses, relates to the disciples themselves: "Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you, and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake." The parallel passages in St. Luke and St. Mark are still stronger, and more particular. St. Mark says, "They shall deliver you up to the councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them†." St. Luke's words are, "They shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake‡." That every circumstance here mentioned was minutely and exactly verified in the sufferings of the apostles and disciples

* Tacitus, l. v. p. 25. Ed. Lips. † Mark xiii. 9.
‡ Luke xxi. 12.

disciples after our Lord's decease, must be perfectly well known to every one that has read the Acts of the Apostles. You will there see that the lives of the apostles were one continued scene of persecution, affliction, and distress of every kind; that they were imprisoned, were beaten, were brought before councils and sanhedrims, and kings; were many of them put to death, and were hated of all nations, by the heathens as well as by the Jews, for the sake of Christ; that is, for being called by his name. The very *name* of a Christian was a crime; and it exposed them to every species of insult, indignity, and cruelty.

To all these calamities was to be added another, which we find in the tenth verse: "Then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another." The meaning is, that many Christians, terrified with these persecutions, shall become apostates from their religion, and renounce their faith; for that is the meaning generally of the word

offend

offend in the New Testament. That this would sometimes happen under such trials and calamities as the first Christians were exposed to, we may easily believe: and St. Paul particularly mentions a few who turned away from him, and forsook him; namely, Phygellus, Hermogenes, and Demas *. The other circumstance here predicted, "that the disciples should betray one another," is remarkably verified by the testimony of the Roman historian Tacitus, who, in describing the persecution under Nero, tells us, "that several Christians were at first apprehended, and then, *by their discovery*, a multitude of others were convicted, and cruelly put to death, with derision and insult †.

It is a natural consequence of all this, that the ardour of many in embracing and professing Christianity should be considerably abated, or, as it is expressed in the twelfth verse, *that the love of many should wax cold*; and of this we find several instances mentioned by the sacred writers ‡.

"But

* 2 Tim. i. 15. iv. 10. † Tac. Ann. l. xv.
‡ 2 Tim. iv. 16. Heb. x. 25.

"But he that shall endure unto the end, (adds our Lord in the thirteenth verse) the same shall be saved." He that shall not be dismayed by these persecutions, but shall continue firm in his faith, and unshaken in his duty to the last, shall be saved, both in this world and the next. It is, we know, the uniform doctrine of Scripture, that they who persevere in the belief and the practice of Christianity to the end of their lives, shall, through the merits of their Redeemer, be rewarded with everlasting life. And with respect to the present life, and the times to which our Saviour here alludes, it is remarkable, that none of his disciples were known to perish in the siege and destruction of Jerusalem.

Another sign which was to precede the demolition of the temple and the city of Jerusalem, was, that the Christian religion was first to be propagated over the greater part of the Roman empire, which in Scripture, as well as by the Roman writers, was called *the world*. "This Gospel of the

kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." Then shall come what is called in the third verse, the *end of the world*; that is, the *Jewish world*, the Jewish state and government.

And accordingly St. Paul, in his epistle to the Colossians, speaks of the Gospel "being come unto all the world, and preached to every creature under heaven*." And we learn from the most authentic writers, and the most ancient records, that the Gospel was preached within thirty years after the death of Christ, in Idumæa, Syria, and Mesopotamia; in Media and Parthia, and many parts of Asia Minor; in Egypt, Mauritania, Ethiopia, and other regions of Africa; in Greece and Italy; as far north as Scythia, and as far westward as Spain, and in this very island which we inhabit; where there is great reason to believe Christianity was planted in the days of the apostles, and before the destruction of

* Col. i. 6. 23.

of Jerusalem. And this, it is said, was to be "for a testimony against them;" that is, against the Jews; for a testimony that the offer of salvation was made to them in every part of the world where they were dispersed; and that, by their obstinate rejection of it, they had merited the signal punishment which soon after overtook them.

Our Lord then goes on to still more alarming and more evident indications of the near approach of danger to the Jewish nation. "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet *, stand in the holy place (let him that readeth understand); then let them that be in Judæa flee into the mountain." The meaning of this passage is clearly and fully explained by the parallel place in St. Luke: "when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh." The *abomination of desolation* therefore denotes the Roman army which

* Chap. ix. 27.

which besieged Jerusalem, and which Daniel also, in the place alluded to, calls the *abomination which makes desolate.*

The Roman army is here called an *abomination*, because upon their standards were depicted the images of their emperor and their tutelary gods, whom they worshipped: and it is well known that idols were held by the Jews in the utmost abhorrence; and the very name they gave them was the expression here made use of, *an abomination.* The word *desolation* is added for an obvious reason, because this mighty army brought ruin and desolation upon Jerusalem.

This city, and the mountain on which it stood, and a circuit of several furlongs around it, were accounted holy ground; and as the Roman standards were planted in the most conspicuous places near the fortifications of the city, they are here said to stand in *the holy place*, or, as St. Mark expresses it, "to stand where they ought not." And Josephus tells us, that after the city was taken, "the Romans brought

brought their ensigns into the temple, and placed one of them against the eastern gate, and sacrificed to them there; which was the greatest insult and outrage that could possibly be offered to that wretched people *."

When therefore this desolating abomination, this idolatrous and destructive army appeared before the holy city, "then," says our Lord, "let them which be in Judæa flee into the mountains; let him which is on the house-top not come down to take any thing out of his house, neither let him that is in the fields return back to take his clothes." These are allusions to Jewish customs, and are designed to impress upon the disciples the necessity of immediate flight, not suffering themselves to be delayed by turning back for any accommodations they might wish for. "And woe unto them that are with child, and to those that give suck in those days! And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day:" that is,

* De Bell. Jud. l. vi. c. 6. s. 1. p. 1283.

is, unfortunate will it be for those who, in such a time of terror and distress, shall have any natural impediments to obstruct their flight, and who are obliged to travel in the winter season, when the weather is severe, the roads rough, and the days short; or on the sabbath-day, when the Jews fancied it unlawful to travel more than a mile or two. These kind admonitions were not lost upon the disciples. For we learn from the best ecclesiastical historians, that when the Roman armies approached to Jerusalem, all the Christians left that devoted city, and fled to Pella, a mountainous country, and to other places beyond the river Jordan. And Josephus also informs us, that when Vespasian was drawing his forces towards Jerusalem, a great multitude fled from Jericho into the *mountainous country* for their security *.

And happy was it for them that they did so, for the miseries experienced by the Jews in that siege, were almost without a parallel

* De Bell. Jud. l. iv. c. 8. s. 2. p. 1193. Ed. Huds.

a parallel in the history of the world. "Then," says our Saviour, "shall be great tribulation, such as was not from the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." This expression is a proverbial one, frequently made us of by the sacred writers to express some very uncommon calamity *, and therefore it is not necessary to take the words in their strictest sense. But yet in fact they were in the present instance almost literally fulfilled; and whoever will turn to the history of this war by Josephus, and there read the detail of the horrible and almost incredible calamities endured by the inhabitants of Jerusalem, during the siege, not only from the fire and sword of the enemies without, but from famine and pestilence, and continual massacres and murders from the fiend-like fury of the seditious zealots within, will be convinced, that the very strong terms made use of by our Lord, even when literally interpreted, do not go beyond the truth. Indeed

* Ex. x. 14. Joel ii. 2. Dan. xii. 1. Maccab. ix. 27.

deed Josephus himself, in his preface to his history, expresses himself almost in the very same words: "Our city, says he, of all those subjected to the Romans, was raised to the highest felicity, and was thrust down again to the lowest gulf of misery; for if the misfortunes of all from the beginning of the world were compared with those of the Jews, they would appear much inferior upon the comparison*." Is not this almost precisely what our Saviour says, "there shall be great tribulation, such as was not from the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." It is impossible, one would think, even for the most stubborn infidel, not to be struck with the great similarity of these two passages; and not to see that the prediction of our Lord, and the accomplishment of it, as described by the historian, are exact counterparts of each other, and seem almost as if they had been written by the very same person. Yet Josephus was not born till after our Saviour

* De Bell. Jud. Procem. p. 955. Ed. Huds.

Saviour was crucified; and he was not a Christian, but a Jew; and certainly never meant to give any testimony to the truth of our religion.

The calamities above mentioned were so severe, that had they been of long continuance the whole Jewish nation must have been destroyed; "except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved," says Christ, in the 23d verse; "but (he adds) for the elect's sake, those days shall be shortened." They *were* shortened for the sake of the elect, that is, of those Jews who had been converted to Christianity; and they were shortened by the besieged themselves, by their seditious and mutual slaughters, and their madness in burning their own provisions.

"Then," continues Jesus, "if any man shall say unto you, Lo; here is Christ, or there, believe it not: for there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders, insomuch that (if it were possible) they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you

before.

before. Wherefore, if they shall say unto you, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west, so shall the coming of the Son of man be. For wheresoever the carcass is, there shall the eagles be gathered together." Our Lord had already cautioned his disciples against believing the false Christs and false prophets who would appear *before* the siege, and he now warns them against those that would rise up *during* the siege. This, Josephus tells us, they did in great abundance; and flattered the Jews with the hope of seeing their Messiah coming, with great power, to rescue them from the hands of the Romans *. And they also pretended to *shew signs and wonders*; the very words made use of by the same historian, as well as by our Lord †. And it is remarkable, that Christ here foretels, not only the appearance of these false prophets, but

* Jos. de Bell. Jud. l. vi. c. 5. s. 2. p. 1281. and Euseb. Hist. Eccles. l. iv. c. 6.

† Jos. Antiq. l. xx. c. 27. s. 6. p. 983. Ed. Huds.

but the very places to which they would lead their deluded followers; and these were, the "desert, and the secret chamber." And accordingly, if you look into the history of Josephus, you will find both these places distinctly specified as the theatres on which these impostors exhibited their delusions. For the historian relates a variety of instances in which these false Christs and false prophets betrayed their followers into the desert, where they were constantly destroyed; and he also mentions one of these pretenders, who declared to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, that God commanded them to go up into a particular part of the temple (into *the secret chamber*, as our Lord expresses it) and there they should receive the signs of deliverance. A multitude of men, women, and children, went up accordingly; but, instead of deliverance, the place was set on fire by the Romans, and six thousand perished miserably in the flames, or by endeavouring to escape them *.

But

* Jos. Antiq. l. xx. c. 7. s. 6. and c. 7. s. 10. De Bell. Jud. l. ii. c. 13. s. 4. and l. vii. c. 11. s. 1. Ed. Huds.

But the appearance of the true Christ was not to be in that way; it was to be as visible and as rapid as a flash of lightning: "for as the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." It shall not be in a remote desert or in a secret chamber of the temple, but shall be rendered conspicuous by the sudden and entire overthrow of Jerusalem, and its inhabitants.

"For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together."

By the carcass is meant the Jewish nation, which was morally and judicially dead; and the instruments of divine vengeance, that is, the Roman armies, whose standards were eagles, would be collected together against this wicked people, as eagles are gathered together to devour their prey.

In the three following verses, the language of our divine Master becomes highly figurative and sublime. "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall

the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather his elect from the four winds, from the one end of heaven to the other."

Few people, I believe, read these verses, without supposing that they refer entirely to the day of judgment, many of these expressions being actually applied to that great event in the very next chapter, and in other parts of Scripture; and indeed several eminent men and learned commentators are of that opinion, and imagine that our Lord here makes a transition from the destruction of Jerusalem to the end of the world, conceiving that such very bold figures of speech could not with propriety be applied to the subversion and extinc-

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tion of any city or state, however great and powerful. But the fact is, that these very same metaphors do frequently in Scripture denote the destruction of nations, cities, and kingdoms. Thus Isaiah *, speaking of the destruction of Babylon, says, "Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. For the stars of heaven, and the constellations thereof, shall not give their light; the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine." And in almost the same terms he describes the punishment of the Idumæans †, and of Sennacherib and his people ‡. Ezekiel speaks in the same manner of Egypt §; and Daniel, of the slaughter of the Jews ‖: and what is still more to the point, the prophet Joel describes this very destruction of Jerusalem in terms very similar to those of Christ; "I will shew wonders in the heavens;

* Ch. xiii. 9.
† Ch. xxiv. 6.
‡ Ch. li. 6.
§ Ch. xxxii. 7, 8.
‖ Ch. viii. 10.

heavens; and in the earth, blood and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord shall come *."

It is evident then that the phrases here made use of, of "the sun being darkened, and the moon not giving her light, and the stars falling from heaven, and the powers of heaven being shaken," are figures meant to express the fall of cities, kingdoms, and nations; and the origin of this sort of language is well illustrated by a late very learned prelate †, who tells us, that "in ancient hieroglyphic writing, the sun, moon, and stars, were used to represent states and empires, kings, queens, and nobility; their eclipse or extinction denoted temporary disasters, or entire overthrow, &c. So the prophets in like manner call kings and empires by the names of the heavenly luminaries. Stars falling from the firmament are employed to denote the destruction of the nobility and other great men; inso-

much,

* Ch. ii. 30, 31. † Bishop Warburton.

much, that in reality the prophetic style seems to be *a speaking hieroglyphic**."

In the same manner, in the next verse, those awful words, "then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory," seem applicable solely to the last advent of Christ to judge the world; and yet it is certain, that in their primary signification they refer to the manifestation of Christ's power and glory, in coming to execute judgment on the guilty Jews, by the total overthrow of their temple, their city, and their government; for so our Lord himself explains what is meant by *the coming of the Son of man*, in the 27th, 28th, and 37th verses of this chapter. And when the prophet Daniel is predicting this very appearance of Christ to punish the Jews, he describes him as "coming in the clouds of heaven, and there was given him dominion and glory, and a kingdom †."

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* Div. Leg. 8vo ed. vol. iv. p. 175. † Dan. vii. 14.

The same remark will hold with regard to the 31st verse; "he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of the earth even to the other." These words, also, though they seem as if they could belong to no other subject than the last day, yet most assuredly relate principally to the great object of this prophecy, the destruction of Jerusalem; after which dreadful event, we are here told that Christ will send forth his *angels*; that is, his messengers or ministers, (for so that word strictly signifies *) to preach his gospel to all the world, which preaching is called by the prophets, "*lifting up* the voice *like a trumpet*†; and they shall gather together his elect (that is, shall collect disciples and converts to the faith) from the four winds, from the four quarters of the earth;" or, as St. Luke expresses it, "from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south‡."

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* Vid. Haggai, i. 13. Mal. ii. 7. iii. 1. Matt. xi. 10. Mark i. 2. Luke viii. 27.

† Isaiah lviii. 1. ‡ Luke xiii. 29.

Our Lord then goes on to point out the *time* when all these things shall take place, and thus answers the other question put to him by the disciples, "Tell us, when shall these things be?" "Now learn, says he, a parable of the fig-tree: When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh; so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

The only observation necessary to be made here is, that the time when all these predictions were to be fulfilled is here limited to a certain period. They were to be accomplished before the generation of men then existing should pass away. And accordingly all these events did actually take place within forty years after our Saviour delivered this prophecy; and this by the way is an unanswerable proof, that every thing our Lord had been saying in

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the preceding part of the chapter related principally, not to the day of judgment, or to any other very remote event, but to the destruction of Jerusalem, which did in reality happen before that generation had passed away.

"But of that day and hour knoweth no man; no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." That is, although the time when Jerusalem is to be destroyed, is, as I have told you, fixed *generally* to this generation, yet the *precise day and hour* of that event is not known either to men or angels, but to God only. This he speaks in his human nature, and in his prophetic capacity. This point was not made known to him by the Spirit, nor was he commissioned to reveal it.

It is supposed by several learned commentators, that the words, *that day* and *that hour*, refer to the day of judgment, which is immediately alluded to in the preceding verse, *heaven and earth shall pass away*. This conjecture is an ingenious one, and may be true; but if it be, this

verse should be inclosed in a parenthesis, because what follows most certainly relates to the destruction of Jerusalem, (to which St. Luke in the seventeenth chapter expressly confines it *) and cannot, without great violence to the words, be applied to the final advent of Christ. "As the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left." That is, when the day of desolation shall come upon the city and temple of Jerusalem, the inhabitants will be as thoughtless and unconcerned, and as unprepared for it, as the antediluvians were for the flood

* Luke xvii. 26, 27; 35, 36.

flood in the days of Noah. But as some (more particularly the Christians) will be more watchful, and in a better state of mind than others, the providence of God will make a distinction between his faithful and his disobedient servants, and will protect and preserve the former, but leave the latter to be taken or destroyed by their enemies; although they may both be in the same situation of life, may be engaged in the same occupations, and may appear to the world to be in every respect in similar circumstances.

Here ends the prophetical part of our Lord's discourse; what follows is altogether exhortatory. It may be called the moral of the prophecy, and the practical application of it not only to his immediate hearers, but to his disciples in all future ages; for this concluding admonition most certainly alludes no less to the final judgment than to the destruction of Jerusalem, and applies with at least equal force to both. Indeed the prophecy itself, although in its primary and strictest sense

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it relates throughout to the destruction of the temple, city, and government of Jerusalem, yet, as I have before observed, may be considered, and was probably intended by Jesus, as a type and an emblem of the dissolution of the world itself, to which the total subversion of a great city and a whole nation bears some resemblance. But with respect to the conclusion, there can be no doubt of its being intended to call our attention to the last solemn day of account; and with a view of its producing this effect, I shall now press it upon your minds in the very words of our Lord, without any comment, for it is too clear to require any explanation, and too impressive to require any additional enforcement. "Watch ye, therefore, for ye know not at what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the good man of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh.

cometh. Who then is a faithful and a wise servant, whom his Lord hath made ruler over his houshold, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, that he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

LECTURE XX.

MATTHEW XXIV.—XXV.

IN my last Lecture I explained to you that remarkable prophecy respecting the destruction of Jerusalem, which is contained in the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew; and by a reference to the historians who record or mention that event, I proved to you the complete and exact accomplishment of that wonderful prediction in all its parts. And this, in a common case, I should have thought fully sufficient for your satisfaction. But this prophecy stands so eminently distinguished by its singular importance, and the great variety of matter which it embraces, and it affords so decisive, so irresistible a proof of the divine authority of our religion, that

it appears to me to be well worthy of a little more attention and consideration. I shall therefore, before I proceed to the next chapter, make such further remarks upon it, as may tend to throw new light upon the subject, to show more distinctly the exact correspondence of the prediction with the event, and to point out the very interesting conclusions that may be drawn from it.

And first I would observe, that, in some instances, the providence of God seems evidently to have interposed in order to bring about several of the events, which Jesus here alludes to or predicts. Thus, in the twelfth year of Nero, Cestius Gallus, the president of Syria, came against Jerusalem with a powerful army; and, as Josephus assures us, he might, had he assaulted the city, easily have taken it, and thereby have put an end to the war*. But without any apparent reason, and contrary to all expectation, he suddenly raised the siege, and departed. This, and some other very

* De Bell. Jud. l. ii. c. 19.

very incidental delays, which took place before Vespasian besieged the city, and Titus surrounded it with a wall, gave the Christians within an opportunity of following our Lord's advice, and of escaping to the mountains, which afterwards it would have been impossible for them to do.

In the same manner the besieged inhabitants themselves helped to fulfil another of our Saviour's predictions, *that those days should be shortened*; for they burnt their own provisions, which would have been sufficient for many years, and fatally deserted their strongest holds, where they never could have been taken by force, the fortifications of the city being considered as impregnable. Titus was so sensible of this, that he himself ascribed his success to God: "We have fought," said he to his friends, "with God on our side; and it is God who hath dragged the Jews out of their strong holds; for what could the hands of men and machines do against such towers as these *?"

In

* Newton's Dissert. on Prophecy, vol. ii. p. 276.

In the next place it is worthy of remark, that at the time when our Lord delivered this prophecy, there was not the slightest probability of the Romans invading Judæa, much less of their besieging the city of Jerusalem, of their surrounding it with a wall, of their taking it by storm, and of their destroying the Temple so entirely, as not to leave one stone upon another. The Jews were then at perfect peace with the Romans. The latter could have no motives of interest or of policy to invade, destroy and depopulate a country, which was already subject to them, and from which they reaped many advantages. The fortifications too of the city were (as I have before observed) so strong, that they were deemed invincible by any human force, and it was not the custom of the Romans to demolish and raze the very foundations of the towns they took, and exterminate the inhabitants, but rather to preserve them as monuments of their victories and their triumphs.

It could not therefore be from mere human

human sagacity and foresight that our Saviour foretold these events; or, had he even hazarded a conjecture respecting a war with the Romans, and the siege of Jerusalem, yet he could only have done this in general terms; he could never have imagined or invented such a variety of minute particulars as he did predict, and as actually came to pass.

It is, indeed, of great importance to observe the surprising assemblage of striking circumstances which Christ pointed out in this prophecy. They are much more numerous than is commonly supposed, and well deserve to be distinctly specified.

They may be arranged under three general heads.

The first consists of those signs that were to *precede* the destruction of Jerusalem.

And these signs were, false Christs, false prophets, rumours of wars, actual wars, nation rising against nation, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, fearful sights, the persecution of the apostles, the apostasy of some Christians, and the treachery of

others, the preservation of Christ's faithful disciples, and the propagation of the Gospel through the whole Roman world.

The second head is the commencement of the siege.

Under this head are specified the distinguishing standard of the Roman army, the eagle, with the images of the gods and their emperor affixed to it.

The idolatrous worship paid to this standard, called the *abomination*, for so it was to the Jews.

The planting of this standard near the holy city, and afterward in the very Temple.

The *desolation* which the Roman armies spread around them.

The escape of the Christians to the mountainous country round Jerusalem.

The inconceivable and unparalleled calamities of every kind which the wretched inhabitants endured during the siege; and the shortening of those days of vengeance on account of the Christians.

The third head is the actual capture of Jerusalem by the besieging army.

And

And here it is foretold, "that not one stone of its magnificent buildings should be left upon another;" that the Temple, the government, the state, the polity of the Jews, should be utterly subverted; and, lastly, that all these things should happen before the then present race of men should be extinguished.

If, now, we collect together the several particulars here specified, they amount to no less than twenty-two in number. A larger detail of minute circumstances than is to be found in any other of our Lord's prophecies; and all these we see actually fulfilled in the history of Josephus, and other ancient writers; and it is extremely remarkable, that his description of the siege of Jerusalem, like this prophecy, is more minutely circumstantial and more spread out into detail, than the account of any other siege that we have in ancient history. It should seem therefore as if this historian was purposely raised up by Providence to record this memorable event, and to verify our Saviour's

predictions. And, indeed, no one could possibly be better qualified for the task than he, from his situation and circumstances, from his integrity and veracity, and, above all, from the opportunities he had of being perfectly well acquainted with every thing he relates.

He was born at Jerusalem, under the reign of the emperor Caligula, and about seven years after our Lord's crucifixion. He was of a noble family; on his father's side descended from the most illustrious of the high priests; and on his mother's side, from the blood royal. At the age of nineteen, after having made a trial of all the different sects of the Jews, he embraced that of the Pharisees; and at the age of twenty-six he made a journey to Rome, to obtain from Nero the release of some Jewish priests, who had been thrown into bonds by Felix the procurator of Judæa. He succeeded in this business; and on his return to Jerusalem found his countrymen resolved on commencing hostilities against the Romans, from which he

he endeavoured to dissuade them, but in vain. He was soon after appointed by the Jewish government to the command of an army in Galilee, where he signalized himself in many engagements; but at the siege of Jotapata was taken prisoner by Vespasian, and afterwards carried by Titus to the siege of Jerusalem, where he was an eye-witness of every thing that passed, till the city was taken and destroyed by the Romans. He then composed his History of the Jewish war, and particularly of the siege and capture of Jerusalem, in seven books; which he first wrote in Hebrew, and afterwards in Greek, and presented it to Vespasian and Titus, by both of whom it was highly approved, and ordered to be made public. And it is in this history that we find the accomplishment of all the several facts and events relative to the siege and the destruction of Jerusalem, which our Saviour foretold forty years before they happened, and which have been above recited. This history is spoken of in the highest terms

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by men of the greatest learning and the soundest judgment, from its first publication to the present time.

The fidelity, the veracity, and probity of the writer, are universally allowed; and Scaliger in particular declares, that not only in the affairs of the Jews, but even of foreign nations, he deserves more credit than all the Greek and Roman writers put together *. Certain at least it is, that he had that most essential qualification of an historian, a perfect and accurate knowledge of all the transactions which he relates; that he had no prejudices to mislead him in the representation of them; and that, above all, he meant no favour to the Christian cause. For even allowing the so much controverted passage, in which he is supposed to bear testimony to Christ, to be genuine, it does not appear that he ever became a convert to his religion, but continued probably a zealous Jew to the end of his life.

From

* In Prolegom. ad opus de Emendatione Temporum.

From this account it is evident, that we may most securely rely on every thing he tells us respecting the siege of Jerusalem; and that nothing can more completely demonstrate the truth of our blessed Lord's predictions, than the uncorrupt, impartial, and undesigned testimony given to their completion by this justly celebrated historian.

Here then we have a proof, which it is impossible to controvert, of our Saviour's perfect knowledge of future events, which belongs solely to God, and to those inspired and sent by him; which of course establishes, in the clearest manner, the divine mission of Christ, and the divine origin of our Religion.

The only pretence that can possibly be set up against this prophecy is, that it was not delivered by our Saviour previous to the destruction of Jerusalem, but inserted afterwards by St. Matthew and the other evangelists, subsequent to that event. This may undoubtedly be said, and many things may be said by those whose

whose trade is objection and cavil; but can it be said with the smallest appearance of truth? Is there the slightest ground to support it? Most certainly not. It is a mere gratuitous assertion without the least shadow of proof; and an opposite assertion is a sufficient answer to it. We deny the fact; and call upon our adversaries to prove it, if they can: they have never so much as attempted it. Not even the *earliest* enemies of our faith, those who were much nearer the primitive ages, and much more likely to detect a fraud in the evangelical writers (if there were any) than modern infidels, even these never intimate the slightest suspicion that this prophecy was inserted after the event.

But beside this, there are good grounds to believe, not only that the three Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, where this prophecy is related, were written and published before the destruction of Jerusalem, but that the writers of them were all dead before that event. It is also well known, that both St. Peter and St. Paul, who allude

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in their Epistles to the approaching ruin of Jerusalem *, (which they learned from our Lord's predictions) and who had seen and approved the Gospels of St. Mark and St. Luke, were put to death under Nero, and Jerusalem was not taken till the succeeding reign of Vespasian.

It should be observed further, that although this prophecy is by far the fullest, and clearest, and most distinct, that our Lord delivered respecting the destruction of Jerusalem, he plainly, though briefly, alludes to it in several other parts of the Gospels †. And these occasional predictions of that event are so frequent, and so perfectly agree with this larger prophecy, they are introduced so incidentally in the way of parables, or in answer to some question; they arise, in short, so naturally from the occasion, and are so inartificially interwoven into the very essence

* Acts ii. 19. 1 Pet. iv. 7. Phil. iv. 5. 1 Thess. ii. 16. Newton on Proph. vol. ii. p. 225. Jortin's Remarks, vol. i. p. 49.

† Matt. xxii. 1—7; xxiii. 33—39. Luke xix. 41—44; xiii. 1—5; &c. &c.

essence and substance of the narrative, that they have every imaginable appearance of having formed an original part of it, and cannot possibly be considered by any good judge of composition as subsequent or fraudulent insertions.

Indeed such a fabrication as this would have been the silliest and most useless fraud that can be imagined. For it is very remarkable, that the sacred writers make no use of this prophecy as a proof of our Saviour's divine powers, or of the truth of his religion. They appeal frequently to the ancient prophecies concerning him, to his miracles, and above all to his resurrection, as evidences that he was the Messiah, and the Son of God; but they never appeal to the accomplishment of this prophecy in support of those great truths, though certainly a very natural and important proof to be adduced in favour of them.

But that which ought, with every reasonable man, to be decisive of the question, is this, that three of the evangelists

out of four concur in giving us this prophecy as a part of their history of our Lord, and as actually delivered by him, at the period assigned to it, which we know was nearly forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem. Now we have no more reason to doubt their veracity in *this* point than in any other; and if, on the strength of their character, on the evident marks of integrity, simplicity, and truth, which appear in every page of their writings; and above all, if in consequence of their undergoing the bitterest sufferings as an evidence of their sincerity, we give implicit credit to what they tell us respecting the life, the death, the doctrines, the miracles, and the resurrection of Christ, there is the very same reason for admitting the genuineness of this prophecy. It stands on the same solid grounds of *their veracity and probity* as the rest of the Gospel does; and when men lay down their lives, as they did, in confirmation of what they assert, they have surely some right to be believed.

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We may then safely consider this prophecy as an unquestionable proof of the divine foreknowledge of our Lord, and the divine authority of the Gospel; and on this ground only (were it necessary) we might securely rest the whole fabric of our religion. Indeed this remarkable prediction has always been considered, by every impartial person, as one of the most powerful arguments in favour of Christianity; and in our own times, more particularly, a man of distinguished talents and acknowledged eminence in his profession, and in the constant habit of weighing, sifting, and scrutinizing evidence with the minutest accuracy in courts of justice, has publicly declared, that he considered this prophecy, if there were nothing else to support Christianity, as *absolutely irresistible* *.

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* See Mr. Erskine's eloquent speech at the trial of Williams, for publishing Paine's Age of Reason; to which I must beg leave to add the weighty and important testimony of that most able and upright judge, Lord Kenyon, who, in his charge to the jury on the same occasion, made this noble CONFESSION OF FAITH:

But our Lord's predictions respecting this devoted city do not end even here. He not only foretels the entire destruction of Jerusalem, but the *continuance* of its desolation and subjection to heathens, and the dispersion and captivity of the Jews for a long period of time. For if we turn to the parallel place in St. Luke, we shall find him expressing himself in these words, respecting the Jews and their city; "they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be

"I am fully impressed with the great truths of religion, which, thank God, I was taught in my early years to believe; and which the hour of reflection and inquiry, instead of creating any doubt, has fully confirmed me in."—How vain are all the idle cavils of the whole tribe of infidels put together, when contrasted with such a declaration as this from such a man!

Since this note was written, the public has to lament the loss of this truly great man. But he is now at rest from his virtuous labours; and he will long be remembered, and revered, not only by his own profession, but by all descriptions of men, as the firm friend and intrepid protector of the laws, the constitution, the morals, and the religion of this country.

be fulfilled*." That is, not only vast numbers of the Jews shall perish at the siege of Jerusalem, partly by their own seditions, and partly by the sword of the enemy, but multitudes shall also be made captives, and be dispersed into all countries; and Jerusalem shall remain in a state of desolation and oppression, trampled upon and trodden down by heathen conquerors and rulers, till all the Gentiles shall be converted to the faith of Christ, and the Jews themselves shall acknowledge him to be the Messiah, and shall be restored to their ancient city.

The former part of this prophecy has been already most exactly fulfilled, and is an earnest that all the rest will in due time be accomplished. The number of Jews slain during the siege was upwards of one million one hundred thousand, and near three hundred thousand more were destroyed in other places in the course of the war†. Besides these, as Josephus informs us, no less than ninety-seven

* Luke xxi. 24.

† Bell. Jud. l. ii. iii. iv. vii. &c.

seven thousand were made captives and dispersed into different countries, some into Egypt, some to Cæsarea, some carried to grace the triumph of Titus at Rome, and the rest distributed over the Roman provinces*; and the whole Jewish people continue to this hour scattered over all the nations of the earth.

With respect to their city, it has remained, for the most part, in a state of ruin and desolation, from its destruction by the Romans to the present time; and has never been under the government of the Jews themselves, but oppressed and broken down by a succession of foreign masters, the Romans, the Saracens, the Franks, the Mamalukes, and last by the Turks, to whom it is still subject. It is not, therefore, only in the history of Josephus, and in other ancient writers, that we are to look for the accomplishment of our Lord's predictions; we see them verified at this moment before our eyes, in the desolated state of the once celebrated city and temple

* Josephus, Bell. Jud. l. vi. c. 9.

of Jerusalem; and in the present condition of the Jewish people, not collected together into any one country, into one political society, and under one form of government, but dispersed over every region of the globe, and every where treated with contumely and scorn.

There was indeed one attempt made to rebuild their temple and their city, and restore them to their ancient prosperity and splendour. It was made, too, for the express and avowed purpose of defeating that very prophecy we have been considering; and the event was such as might be expected from the folly and presumption of the man who dared to oppose the designs of Providence, and to fight against God. This man was the emperor Julian, who, as you all know, was first a Christian, then apostatized from that religion, professed himself a pagan, and became a bitter and avowed enemy to the Gospel. This prince assured the Jews, that if he was successful in the Persian war, he would rebuild their city, restore them to their

habitations, re-establish their government and their religion, and join with them in worshipping the great God of the universe. He actually begun this singular enterprise, by attempting to rebuild their temple with the greatest magnificence. He assigned immense sums for the structure; and gave it in charge to Alypius of Antioch, who had formerly been lieutenant in Britain, to superintend the work. Alypius exerted himself with great vigour, and was assisted in it by the governor of the province. But soon after they had begun the work, dreadful balls of fire bursting out from the foundations in several parts, rendered the place inaccessible to the workmen, who were frequently burnt with the flames; and in this manner, the fiery elements obstinately repelling them, forced them at length to abandon the design. The account of this extraordinary miracle we have not only from ancient Christian writers of credit, who lived at the very time when it happened, but from an heathen author of great veracity, Ammianus Marcellinus, who wrote

the history of Roman affairs from Nerva to the death of Valens, in the year 378. Though he wrote in Latin, he was a Greek by birth. He had several honourable military commands under different emperors; was with Julian in his Persian expedition, in the year 363, and was a great admirer of that emperor, whom he makes his hero; yet acknowledges that his attempt to rebuild the temple of Jerusalem was defeated in the manner I have mentioned *. The fact is frequently appealed to by the Christians of those days, who affirm that it was in the mouths of all men, and was not denied even by the atheists themselves; and "if it seem yet incredible to any one, he may repair (say they) both to witnesses of it yet living, and to them who have heard it from their mouths; yea, they may view the foundations, lying yet bare and naked †." And of this, says Chrysostom, all we Christians

* Ammianus Marcellinus, l. xxiii. c. 1, p. 350. Ed. Valesii.

† Sozomen. Hist. Eccles. l. v, c. 22. p. 632. Do. 633. B.

tians are witnesses; these things being done not long since in our own time *.

Such are the testimonies for this miracle, which are collected and stated with great force by the learned Bishop Warburton, in his work called "Julian;" and most of them are also admitted by Mr. Gibbon, who, in his recital of this miracle, acknowledges that it is attested by *contemporary and respectable evidence*; that Gregory Nazianzen, who published his account of it before the expiration of the same year, declares it was not disputed by the infidels of those days, and that his testimony is confirmed by the *unexceptionable testimony* of Ammianus Marcellinus †.

I now proceed to the explanation of the next chapter, the 25th of St. Matthew, which begins with presenting to us two parables, that of the ten virgins, and that of the servants of a great lord entrusted with different talents, of which they are called upon to render an account. As these parables

* Chrys. adv. Judæos, Orat. iii. p. 436.

† History of the Roman Empire, vol. ii. p. 388.

parables contain nothing that requires a very particular explanation, I shall content myself with observing, that they are designed to carry on the subject with which the preceding chapter concludes; namely, that of the last solemn day of retribution: and the object of both is to call our attention to that great event, and to warn us of the necessity of being always prepared for it. Thus in the parable of the ten virgins, the five that were wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps, and when the bridegroom appeared they were ready to receive him, and went in with him to the marriage. But the five that were foolish took no oil with them; and while they went to procure it, the bridegroom *unexpectedly* came, and the door was *shut* against them. The application is obvious, and is given by our Lord himself in these words, "watch ye, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour when the Lord cometh."

In the same manner, in the parable of the talents, he that had received the five talents,

talents, and he that had received the two, did, during the absence of their Lord, so diligently cultivate and so considerably improve them, that when at length he came to reckon with them, they returned him his own again with usury, and received both applause and reward; while that slothful and indolent servant, who had received only one talent, and instead of improving it went and hid it in the earth, when his lord came and required it at his hands, was severely reprimanded for his want of activity and exertion, and was cast out as an unprofitable servant into outer darkness.

This, like the former parable, was plainly meant to intimate to us that we ought to be *always prepared* to meet our Lord, and to give him a good account of the use we have made of our time, and of the talents, whether many or few, that were entrusted to our care.

After these admonitory parables, and these earnest exhortations to prepare for the last great day, our blessed Lord is naturally

naturally led on to a description of the day itself; and it is a description which for dignity and grandeur has not its equal in any writer, sacred or profane. It is as follows: "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, and the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee; or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger,

a stranger, and took thee in; or naked, and clothed thee? or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he also say unto those on his left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal."

Such

Such is the description which our divine Master gives us of the great day of account; and so solemn, so awful, so sublime a scene, was never before presented to the mind of man.

Our Saviour represents himself as a great and mighty King, as the supreme Lord of all, sitting on the throne of his glory, with *all the nations of the earth assembled before him*, and waiting their final doom from his lips. What an astonishing and stupendous spectacle is this! He then at one glance, which penetrates the hearts of every individual of that immense multitude, discerns the respective merits or demerits of every human being there present, and separates the good from the bad with as much ease as a shepherd divides his sheep from his goats. He next questions them on one most important branch of their duty as a *specimen* of the manner in which the inquiry into the whole of their behaviour will be conducted; and then, with the authority of an almighty Judge and Sovereign, he in a few words pronounces

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the irreversible sentence, which consigns the wicked to everlasting punishment, and the righteous to life eternal.

Before I press this important subject any further on the hearts of those who hear me, I must make a few observations on the description which has been just laid before you.

The first is, that all mankind, when assembled before the judgment-seat of Christ, are divided into two great classes, the wicked and the good, those who are punished, and those who are rewarded. There is no middle, no intermediate station provided for those who may be called neutrals in religion, who are indifferent and lukewarm, who are "neither hot nor cold," who do not reject the Gospel, but give themselves very little concern about it, who, instead of working out their salvation with fear and trembling, leave that matter to take care of itself, and are at perfect ease as to the event. These men cannot certainly expect to inherit everlasting life. But they hope, probably,

to

to be considered as harmless inoffensive beings, and to be exempted from punishment at least, if not entitled to reward. But how vain this hope is, our Saviour's representation of the final judgment most clearly shows. They who are not set on the right, must go to the left. They who are not rewarded, are consigned to punishment. There are indeed different mansions both for the righteous and the wicked; there are different degrees of punishment for the one, and of reward for the other; yet still it does not appear that there is any middle or intermediate state between punishment and reward.

The next remark, and which has some affinity to the last, is, that we are to be examined at the bar of our great Judge, not merely as to our exemption from crimes, but as to our performance of good actions; substantial and genuine Christian virtues are expected at our hands. It will not be sufficient for us to plead that we kept ourselves clear from sin; we must show that we have exerted ourselves

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in the faithful discharge of all those various important duties which the Gospel requires from us.

Lastly, it must be observed, and it is an observation of the utmost importance, and which I wish to impress most forcibly upon your minds, that although charity to our neighbour, and indeed only one branch of that comprehensive duty, viz. *liberality to the poor*, is here specified, as the only Christian virtue, concerning which inquiry will be made at the day of judgment; yet we must not imagine that this is the only virtue which will be expected from us, and that on this alone will depend our final salvation. Nothing can be more distant from truth, or more dangerous to religion, than this opinion. The fact is, that charity, or love to man in all its extent, being the most eminent of all the evangelical virtues, being that which Christ has made the very badge and discriminating mark of his religion, is here constituted by him the representative of all other virtues; just as faith is, in various

passages

passages of Scripture, used to denote and represent the whole Christian religion. Nothing is more common than this sort of figure (called a synecdoche) in profane, as well as sacred writers; by which a part, an essential and important part, is made to stand for the whole. But that neither charity nor any other single virtue can entitle us to eternal life, is clear from the whole tenour of the New Testament, which every where requires universal holiness of life. We are commanded "to stand perfect and complete in *all* the will of God *;" to add to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity †. Here you see that charity makes only one in that large assemblage of virtues, which are required to constitute the Christian character. And so far is it from being true, that any single virtue will give us admission into the kingdom

* Col. iv. 12. † 2 Pet. i. 6.

dom of heaven, that St. James lays down a directly opposite doctrine, namely, that if we do not to the best of our power cultivate *every* virtue without exception, we shall be objects of punishment, instead of reward. "Whosoever," says he, "shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." Nay, even if we endeavour to fulfil *all* righteousness, yet it is not on that righteousness, but on the merits of our Redeemer, that we must rely for our acceptance with God. For the plain doctrine of Scripture is, that it is "the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanseth us from all sin*;" and that "by grace we are saved, through faith; and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God†." Of this, indeed, no notice is taken in our Saviour's description of the last judgment, and that for a plain reason, because he had not yet finished the gracious work of our redemption. He had not yet offered himself up upon the cross as a sacrifice,

* 1 John i. 7. † Ephes. ii. 8.

sacrifice, a propitiation for the sins of the whole world. But after that great act of mercy was performed, it is then the uniform language of the sacred writers, "that we are justified freely by the grace of God, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus *."

We must therefore collect the terms of our salvation not from any one passage of Scripture, but from the whole tenour of the sacred writings taken together; and if we judge by this rule, which is the only one that can be securely relied upon, we shall find that nothing less than a sincere and lively faith in Christ, producing in us, as far as the infirmity of our nature will allow, *universal holiness of life*, can ever make our final calling and election sure. But thus much we may certainly collect from our Lord's representation of our final judgment, that charity, or love to man, in the true Scriptural sense of that word, is one of the most essential duties of our religion; and that to neglect that

* Rom. iii. 24.

that virtue, above all others, which our Redeemer and our Judge has selected as the peculiar object of his approbation, and as the representative of all the other evangelical virtues, must be peculiarly dangerous, and render us peculiarly unfit to appear at the last day before the great tribunal of Christ.

How soon we may be summoned there no one can tell. The final dissolution of this earthly system may be at a great distance; but, what is the same thing to every moral and religious purpose, *death* may be very near. It is at least, even to the youngest of us, uncertain, and in whatever state it overtakes us, in that state will judgment find us; for there is no repentance in the grave; and as we die, so shall we stand before our Almighty Judge. "Take heed therefore to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and the cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come upon all them that

dwell on the face of the earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man*."

* Luke xxi. 34, 35, 36.

LECTURE XXI.

MATTHEW XXVI.

WE are now approaching the last sad scene of our Saviour's life, which commences with the 26th chapter, and continues in a progressive accumulation of one misery upon another to the end of St. Matthew's Gospel.

The 26th chapter, which will be the subject of the present Lecture, begins with informing us that two days before the great Feast of the Passover, the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, assembled together unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty and kill him.

Whilst they were thus employed, Jesus

himself was in Bethany (a small village near Jerusalem) at the house of a person called Simon, whom he had cured of a leprosy; and here an incident took place which marks at once the manners of the country and the times, and places in a striking point of view the different characters of the several persons concerned in it.

As Jesus was sitting at meat in the house above mentioned, "there came unto him a woman, having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head. But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? for this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you, but me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. Verily I say unto you, wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there

there also shall this which this woman hath done be told for a memorial of her."

There are in this little story several circumstances that deserve our notice.

The first is, that the act here mentioned, of pouring the ointment on the head of Jesus, though it may appear strange to us, yet was perfectly conformable to the customs of ancient times, not only in Asia, but in the more polished parts of Europe. Chaplets of flowers and odoriferous unguents are mentioned by several classic authors as in use at the festive entertainments both of the Greeks and Romans; and particularly among the Jews, the custom of anointing the head seems to have been almost as common a practice as that of washing the face. For they are mentioned together by our Lord in his direction to his disciples on the subject of fasting: "But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which seeth in secret *."

But

* Matt. vi. 17, 18.

But there was a much higher purpose to which the effusion of ointment on the head was applied to the Jews. It was by this ceremony that Kings, Priests, and Prophets, were set apart and consecrated to their respective offices. And for this reason it was that our blessed Lord himself, who united in his own person the threefold character of King, Priest, and Prophet, was distinguished by the name of the MESSIAH, which in the Hebrew language means THE ANOINTED. It was therefore with peculiar propriety that this discriminating mark of respect was shown to Jesus by the devout woman here mentioned, though she herself was probably altogether unconscious of that propriety. Jesus however saw at once the piety of her heart, and the purity of her intentions, and with that sweetness of temper and urbanity of manners which were natural to him, not only accepted her humble offering with complacency, but generously defended her against the illiberal cavils of his fastidious followers. And then he added a promise

of that distinguished honour which should perpetuate this meritorious act of hers to all future ages: "Verily I say unto you, that wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this that this woman hath done be told for a memorial of her." This we know was no vain prediction; it has been most literally and punctually fulfilled, and we ourselves are witnesses of its completion at this very moment.

The next remarkable occurrence in this chapter is the institution of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper by our Saviour, when he was eating the Passover with his disciples.

The Passover was one of the most solemn and sacred feasts of the Jews. It was so called because it was established in commemoration of the deliverance of the Jews from their bondage in Egypt, at which time the destroying angel, when he put to death the first-born of the Egyptians, *passed over* the houses of the Israelites, which were all marked with the blood

of

of the lamb that had been killed and eaten the evening before in every Hebrew house, and was therefore called the *Paschal Lamb.*

This great festival our Saviour observed with his disciples the evening before he suffered, and with them ate the paschal lamb, which was a prophetic type of himself. For he was the *real* paschal lamb that was sacrificed for the sins of men. He was the lamb slain from the foundation of the world*; the lamb without blemish and without spot †, as the paschal lamb was ordered to be ‡. There can be no doubt, therefore, that the paschal lamb of the Jews was meant to be an emblem of our Lord. The slaying of that lamb prefigured the slaying of Christ upon the Cross; and as those houses which were sprinkled with the blood of the lamb were passed over by the destroying angel, so they whose souls are sprinkled with the blood of Christ are saved from destruction, and their sins *passed over* and forgiven for his.

* Rev. xiii. 8. † 1 Pet. i. 19.
‡ Ex. xii. 5.

his sake. And it is a very remarkable circumstance, that our Saviour was crucified, and our deliverance from the bondage of sin completed, in the same month, and on the same day of the month, that the Israelites were delivered from the bondage of Egypt, by their departure from that land. For the Israelites went out of Egypt, and Christ was put to death, on the fifteenth day of the month Nisan.

I have premised thus much respecting the passover and the paschal lamb, because it will throw considerable light on the true nature and meaning of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which Jesus now instituted, and of which the evangelist gives the following account: "When the even was come, our Lord sat down with the twelve to eat the passover; and as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the New

Testament,

Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." This is the whole of the institution of the sacred rite by our blessed Lord, as recorded in St. Matthew's Gospel; and nothing can be more evident than that when he brake the bread, and gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat, this is my body;" he meant to say that the bread was to represent his body, and the breaking of it was to represent the breaking of his body upon the cross. In the same manner, when he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink ye all of it, for this is my blood of the New Testament (or New Covenant) which is shed for many, for the remission of sins;" his meaning was, that the wine in the cup was to be a representation of his blood that was shed upon the cross as an expiation and atonement for the sins of the whole world. And his disciples were to eat the bread and drink the wine so consecrated, and so appropriated to this particular purpose, in grateful remembrance of what our

Lord

Lord suffered for their salvation, and that of all mankind; for St. Luke adds these affecting and impressive words of our Saviour, *This do in remembrance of me.*

The Lord's Supper therefore was evidently to be a solemn commemoration and recognition of the redemption and deliverance of mankind by the death of Christ, as the Feast of the Passover was of the deliverance of the Israelites from the destroying angel. Nor is this all; for as the Jews were accustomed in their peace-offerings to eat a part of the victim, and thus partook of the sacrifice; so they would perceive that in this *new* institution, the eating of the bread and drinking of the wine was a mark and symbol of their participating in the effects of this *new* peace-offering, the death of Christ; whose body was broken, and whose blood was shed for them on the cross.

They would also see that this supper of our Lord was from that time to be substituted in the room of the passover: and that they might have no doubt on this

head,

head, our Lord expressly declares that this was to be the case; for immediately after the institution of this sacrament he adds, "I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it *new* with you in my Father's kingdom." The meaning is, this is the last time that this supper shall be a representation of the passover. It shall hereafter take a *new* signification. When my kingdom (that is, my religion) is fully confirmed and established by my rising from the dead, this supper shall be the memorial of a more noble sacrifice. The passover, which was a type of the redemption to be wrought by me, shall be fulfilled and completed by my death and resurrection. The shadow passes away; the substance takes place; and when you eat this supper in remembrance of me, there will I be virtually present amongst you; and your souls shall be nourished and refreshed by my grace, as your bodies are by the bread and wine.

You will perceive, by what I have here said

said on the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, that I have confined myself to that which was immediately before me, the original institution of it by our blessed Lord. I have not entered into those further illustrations of this holy rite, which are presented to us in other parts of Scripture; particularly in the 11th chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. To go at length into the consideration of this important subject, would lead me into a much longer discussion than the nature of this discourse will admit. I shall therefore only observe further, that whoever reads with attention this first institution of the Lord's Supper, whoever reflects that it was the very last meal that our Lord ate with his disciples, that the next day he underwent for our sakes a most excruciating and ignominious death, and that he requires us to receive this sacrament *in remembrance of him*; whoever, I say, can, notwithstanding all this, disobey the last command of his dying Redeemer, must be destitute, not only of all the

devout

devout sentiments of a Christian, but of all the honest feelings of a man.

After having thus kept the passover for the last time, our Lord and his apostles sung a hymn, as was usual with the Jews after their repasts; and the hymn they sung on this occasion was probably what they called *the Paschal Psalms*, from the 113th to the 118th, in which the disciples, accustomed to that recital, readily joined. They then went out into the Mount of Olives; and as they were going, Jesus saith unto them, "All ye shall be *offended* because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee." This was a prophetic warning to the disciples, that they would all be terrified by the dangers that awaited him, and would desert and virtually renounce him that very night. The words here quoted, "I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad," are from the thir-

teenth

teenth chapter of Zechariah. But to console and support them under this trial, our Lord assures them that he would rise again from the dead, and after his resurrection would meet them at a certain place he appointed in Galilee. The apostles, as we may easily imagine, were greatly hurt at this admonitory prediction of our Lord, and protested that they would never forsake him. But St. Peter more particularly, who, from the ardour of his disposition, was always more forward in his professions, and more indignant at the slightest reflection on his character, than any of the rest, immediately cried out, with warmth and eagerness, "Though all men should be offended because of thee, yet will I *never* be offended." But Jesus, who knew him much better than he did himself, said unto him, "Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow (that is, before three in the morning), thou shalt deny me thrice." Peter, still confident of his own integrity and sincere attachment to his divine

Master, and ignorant of the weakness of human nature at the approach of danger, replied, with still greater vehemence, "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee:" and the rest of the disciples joined with him in these earnest protestations of inviolable fidelity. How far they were verified by the event, we shall soon see.

We are now arrived at a very awful and somewhat mysterious part of our Saviour's history, his agony in the garden, which is next related to us by St. Matthew.

"Then cometh Jesus (says the evangelist) with them to a place called Gethsemane, a rich valley near the Mount of Olives, through which ran the brook Cedron, and on the side was a garden, into which Jesus entered. And he said unto his disciples, Sit ye here (at the entrance probably of the garden), while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him, into a more retired part of the garden, Peter, and the two sons of Zebedee, James and John, the very same disciples

who accompanied him at his transfiguration; that they who had been witnesses of his glory might be witnesses also of his humiliation and affliction. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible (that is, if it be possible for man to be saved, and thy glory promoted as effectually in any other way as by my death) let this cup, this bitter cup of affliction, pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt. And he cometh unto his disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? you who so lately made such vehement professions of attachment to me! Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." Ye have need to watch and pray for your own sakes, as well as mine, that you may not be overcome by the severe trials that await you, nor be tempted to desert me. Yet at the

same moment, feeling for the infirmity of human nature, he adds, "the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." That is, I know your hearts are right, and your intentions good; but the weakness of your frail nature overpowers your best resolutions, "and the thing which ye would ye do not." "He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. And he came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy. And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on *now* and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going: behold, *he* is at hand that doth betray me." That is, henceforth, hereafter (for so the original strictly means) you may take your rest; your watching can be of no further use to me: my trial is over, my agony is subdued,

subdued, and my destiny determined. I shall soon be betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise, therefore, let us go and meet this danger. Behold, he that betrayeth me is at hand.

This is the account given us of what is called our Saviour's agony in the garden; in the nature and circumstances of which there is certainly something "difficult to be understood;" but it is at the same time pregnant with instruction and consolation to every disciple of Christ.

We may observe, in the first place, that the terror and distress of our Lord's mind on this occasion seems to have been extreme, and the agony he endured, in the highest degree poignant and acute. He is said here to be "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." St. Mark adds, that he was "sore amazed, and very heavy*;" and St. Luke tells us, that "being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground†." To what cause

* Ch. xiv. 33. † Ch. xxii. 44.

cause could these uncommonly painful sensations be owing? There is great reason to believe that they could not arise solely from the fear of death, or of the torments and the ignominy he was about to undergo; for many great and good men, many of the primitive martyrs for instance, and of our first reformers, have met death and tortures without feeling, at least without expressing, such excessive terrors of mind as these.

But it should be considered, that besides the apprehensions of a death in the highest degree excruciating and disgraceful, to which in his human nature he would be as liable as any other person, there were several circumstances peculiar to himself, which might exceedingly embitter his feelings, and exasperate his sufferings.

In the first place, from the foreknowledge of every thing that could befal him, he would have a quicker sense and a keener perception of the torments he was to undergo, than any other person could possibly

sibly have, from the anticipation of future sufferings.

In the next place, the complicated miseries which he knew that his death would bring upon his country, for which he manifested the tenderest concern; the distress in which it would plunge a mother and a friend that were infinitely dear to him; and the cruel persecutions and afflictions of various kinds, to which he foresaw that the first propagation of his religion would expose his beloved disciples; all these considerations, operating on a mind of such exquisite sensibility as his, must make a deep and painful impression, and add many a bitter pang to the anguish which preyed upon his soul. Nor is it at all improbable, that *his* great enemy and ours, the prince of darkness, whom he came to overthrow, and with whom he maintained a constant conflict through life, and triumphed over by his death; it is not, I say, at all improbable, that this malignant being should exert his utmost power, by presenting real, and

raising up imaginary terrors to shake the constancy of his soul, and deter him from the great work he had undertaken. These, and a multitude of other agonizing distresses, unknown and inconceivable to us, which might necessarily spring from so vast, so momentous, so stupendous a work, as the salvation of a whole world, make a plain distinction between our Saviour's situation and that of any other martyr to the cause of truth, and most clearly prove that there never was "a sorrow, in every respect, like unto his sorrow *." It is evident, indeed, that there was some other cause of his agony beside that of his approaching death; for it is said in the Epistle to the Hebrews, that he was *heard in that he feared* †; that is, was delivered from the terrors that oppressed him; and yet we know he was *not* delivered from the *death of the cross.*

And it should be observed in the last place, that notwithstanding his temporary agonies of mind; notwithstanding he was

sore

* Lam. i. 12. † Heb. v. 7.

"sore amazed, and exceeding sorrowful, even unto death;" notwithstanding he prayed most earnestly and fervently "that the bitter cup of affliction might, if possible, pass away from him;" yet, upon the final result, he manifested the utmost firmness and fortitude of soul: and the constant termination of his prayer was, *not my will, but thine be done.* He submitted with the most perfect resignation to those very calamities which he felt so acutely, and deprecated so earnestly; and went out from the garden to meet the dangers that approached him with that noble and dignified address to his slumbering disciples, "Rise, let us be going; behold, he is at hand that doth betray me." It is evident then that this remarkable incident in the history of our Lord, which has given occasion to so much unfounded and idle cavil, instead of lowering his character in the slightest degree, adds fresh lustre to it, and increases our veneration for his exalted virtues.

And what is of no less importance, it presents

presents to us instructions the most edifying, and reflections the most consolatory to the weakness of our nature.

We see, in the first place, that our Lord did not pretend to that unfeeling heroism, that total insensibility to pain and affliction, which some of the ancient philosophers affected. On the contrary, in his human nature he felt like a man; he felt the weight of his own sorrows, and dropped the tear of sympathy for those of others. To those, therefore, who are oppressed and bowed down (as the best of men sometimes are) with a load of grief, who find, as the Psalmist expresses it, "their flesh and their heart failing," and their spirits sinking within them, it must be a most reviving consideration to reflect, that in this state even of extreme depression, there is no guilt; that it is no mark of God's displeasure; that even his beloved Son was no stranger to it; "that he was a man of sorrows, and well acquainted with grief; that therefore he is not a hard, unfeeling, obdurate master, who cannot be touched

touched with our infirmities, but one who was in all things tried and afflicted as we are, yet without sin." He knows what sorrow is; he knows how hard it sometimes presses even on the firmest minds; and he will not fail to extend that relief to others, for which even he himself applied with so much fervency to the Father of all.

From his example, too, on this occasion, we learn what conduct we ought to observe when distress and misery overtake us. We are not only allowed but encouraged by what *he* did, to put up our petitions to the Throne of Grace for help in time of need. We are permitted to pray for the removal of our calamities with earnestness and with fervour; we may implore the Almighty that the bitter cup of affliction may pass away from us; but the conclusion must always be (what his was) "not my will, O my Father, but thine be done." And one thing we may be assured of, that if the evils which overwhelm us are not removed, yet our supplications shall not be in vain; we shall at the least be enabled

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to bear them. And though we must not expect to have an angel sent from heaven to support us, as was done to Jesus, yet we may expect, and expect with confidence, that a more than angelic comforter, even the Spirit of God, will shed his healing influence over our souls, and preserve us from sinking even under the severest trials.

And there is still one further lesson of no small importance, which this part of our Saviour's history may teach us.

Extreme affliction, as we all but too well know, has a natural tendency, not only to depress our spirits, but to sour our tempers, and to render us fretful and irritable, and severe towards the failings of others. But how did it operate on our blessed Lord? Instead of injuring, it seemed rather to improve the heavenly mildness of his disposition, and to make him more indulgent to the failings of his followers. For when in the very midst of all his anguish, they could so far forget his sorrows, and their own professions of attachment

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to him, as to sink into sleep, how gentle was his reproof to them for this want of sensibility and attention to him: "Could you not watch with me one hour?" And even this affectionate rebuke he immediately tempers with a kind excuse for them: "the spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak."

I now proceed in the melancholy narrative. "And while he yet spake, lo! Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, Master; and kissed him. And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they and laid hands on Jesus, and took him."

"And behold, one of them which were with Jesus (St. Peter) stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest (whose name was Malchus),

Malchus), and smote off his ear." Here again we see the warmth and vehemence of Peter's temper, which prompted him to a well-meant, though injudicious display of his zeal in his Master's cause. "Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into its place, for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?"

From this reproof to Peter, we are not to infer that the use of the sword in self-defence is unlawful; but that the use of it against the *magistrate* and *the ministers of justice* (which was the case in the present instance) is unlawful. It was meant also to check that propensity, which is but too strong and too apparent in a large part of mankind, to have recourse to the sword on *all* occasions; and more particularly to restrain private persons from avenging private injuries, which they should rather

rather leave to the magistrate or to God; for "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord*." In all such cases, they who take the sword unjustly and rashly will probably, as our Saviour here forewarns them, perish with the sword; with the sword of their adversary, or of the magistrate. That denunciation might also allude to the Jews, who now seized on Jesus; and might be meant to intimate to his disciples, that it was perfectly needless for them to draw their swords on these miscreants, since they would all perish at the siege or capture of Jerusalem by the sword of the Romans.

If it had been the intention of Providence to protect Jesus and his religion by force, there is no doubt but a host of angels would have been sent to defend him, as one was actually sent to comfort him. But this would have defeated the very purpose for which he came into the world, which was, that he should "make his soul an offering for sin†." The prophets foretold

* Rom. xii. 19. † Isaiah liii. 10.

foretold (more particularly Isaiah and Daniel) that he should do so. And beside this, nothing could be more abhorrent, from the spirit of his religion, than force, violence, and bloodshed. These instruments of destruction he left to fanatics and impostors. The only weapons he made use of were of a different nature; the sword of the Spirit, the shield of faith, and the armour of righteousness.

"In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief, with swords and staves, for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the Temple, and ye laid no hold on me. But all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled; (which, as I have already observed, predicted his sufferings and his death). Then all his disciples forsook him, and fled." Here we have the exact completion of that prophecy which he had just before delivered, that all his disciples should be *offended* because of him; that is, should desert him that very night. And that this prediction was so accom-

accomplished, is clear beyond all controversy; because it was an event which the disciples would for their own credit gladly have suppressed, if they durst. By recording this event, they recorded their own weakness, their own pusillanimity. And we may be perfectly sure that they would not invent a falsehood on purpose to perpetuate their own disgrace. We have therefore, in this incident, a demonstrative proof, both that our Lord's prophecy was actually fulfilled, and that the evangelists were men of the strictest veracity and integrity, who were determined to sacrifice every thing, even their own reputation, to the sacred cause of truth.

Jesus being now in the possession of his enemies, they that had laid hold on him led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. But Peter, though he had fled with the rest, yet ashamed of his cowardice, and still really attached to his Master, summoned up for the moment resolution enough to turn back and follow

the crowd (but with cautious and trembling steps) to the palace of the high priest, "and went in, and sat with the servants in the hall of the palace, to see the end. Now the chief priests and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus to put him to death, but found none; yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none." Their object was to put Jesus to death; and for this purpose they sought out for false witnesses, to charge him with a *capital* crime. To condemn any one to death, their own law required two witnesses; and it was also necessary for them to produce evidence sufficient to induce the Roman governor to ratify their sentence, without which it was of no avail. There was no difficulty in finding out and suborning false witnesses in abundance, who were perfectly well disposed to conform to their wishes; but for a long time they found none whose evidence came up to the point they aimed at; none who could prove against Jesus a capital offence. But at length, "came

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two false witnesses, and said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days." Now to speak disrespectfully, or to prophesy against the temple, was considered by the Jews as *blasphemy*, and of course a capital offence. But the truth was, that Jesus said no such thing. The expressions alluded to by the witnesses were those he spoke, when, after casting the buyers and sellers out of the temple, the Jews asked him what sign he could give them of his authority to do these things? His answer was, not as the witnesses stated it, "I am able to destroy this temple;" but it was, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." So St. John expressly tells us*; and also, that by this temple he meant his own body, to which he probably pointed at the time. The high priest, sensible, perhaps, that even this evidence would not completely answer his purpose, proceeds to interrogate our Saviour, hoping that he might be drawn by

* Chap. ii. 19.

by artful questions to condemn himself. He arose, therefore, and said unto Jesus, "Answerest thou nothing? What is it that these witness against thee?" Is it true, or is it false? and what have you to say in your own defence? But Jesus held his peace. He disdained to make any answer to such unfounded and contemptible accusations. He saw that his judges were predetermined; that every thing he could say would be of no avail; and that the only proper part for him to take, was to observe a dignified silence. The high priest perceiving this, had recourse to a measure which he knew must compel our Lord to speak: "I adjure thee," says he, "by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ the Son of God." This calling upon a man to swear by the living God was called the oath of adjuration, and was the Jewish mode of administering an oath either to a witness or a criminal; and when so adjured, they were obliged to answer. Jesus now therefore conceived

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himself bound in conscience to break his silence, and said to the high priest, "Thou hast said;" that is, thou hast said what is true, I *am* the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God; for all these were synonimous terms among the Jews. But as our Lord's actual appearance and situation did but ill accord with a character of such high dignity, he proceeds to assure his judges, that what he affirmed was nevertheless unquestionably true; and that they themselves should in due time have the fullest proof of it. For, says he, "hereafter ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." Sitting at the right hand of power, means sitting at the right hand of God, to whom the Jews sometimes gave the appellation of *power*; and *coming in the clouds of heaven*, was with the Jews a characteristic mark of the Messiah. And the whole passage relates not to the final judgment, but to the coming of Christ to execute vengeance on

the Jews in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. "Then the high priest rent his clothes (a mark of extreme horror and indignation) saying, he hath spoken blasphemy, by declaring himself the Christ the Son of God, and assuming all the marks of divine power. What further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death;" guilty of a crime that deserves death. "Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands, saying, Prophesy unto us; who is he that smote thee?"

Such were the indignities offered to the Lord of all, by his own infatuated creatures; and although he could with one word have laid them prostrate at his feet, yet he bore all these insults without a single murmur or complaint, and never once spake unadvisedly with his lips. "Though he was reviled, he reviled not again;

again; though he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously *."

The evangelist now resumes the history of St. Peter, who, while these things were transacting in the council-room, sat without in the palace; and a damsel came unto him, saying, "Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest. And when he was come out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man. And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them, for thy speech betrayeth thee. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the words of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow thou shalt deny me

* 1 Pet. ii. 23.

me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly."

This most interesting story is related by all the evangelists, with a few immaterial variations in each; but the substance is the same in all. There is, however, one circumstance added by St. Luke, so exquisitely beautiful and touching, that it well deserves to be noticed here. He tells us, that after Peter had denied Jesus thrice, "immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew; *and the Lord turned and looked upon Peter* *." What effect that look must have had on the heart and on the countenance of Peter, every one may, perhaps, in some degree conceive; but it is utterly impossible for any words to describe, or, I believe, even for the pencil of a Guido to express †. The sacred historian therefore most judiciously makes no attempt to work upon our passions or our feelings by any display of eloquence on

* Ch. xxii. 61.

† In fact, I cannot learn that any great master has ever yet selected this incident as the subject of a picture.

on the occasion. He simply relates the fact, without any embellishment or amplification; and only adds, "and Peter remembered the words of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice; and he went out and wept bitterly."

The reflections that crowd upon the mind from this most affecting incident of Peter's denial of his Master, are many and important; but I can only touch, and that slightly, on a few.

The first is, that this event in the history of St. Peter, is a clear and striking accomplishment of our Saviour's prediction, that before the cock crew he should deny him thrice. And it is very remarkable, that there are in this same chapter no less than four other prophecies of our Lord, which were all punctually fulfilled, some of them like this, within a few hours after they were delivered.

The next observation resulting from the fall of Peter is the melancholy proof it affords us of the infirmity of human nature,

nature, the weakness of our best resolutions, when left to ourselves, and the extreme danger of confiding too much in our own strength.

That St. Peter was most warmly attached to Jesus, that his intentions were upright, and his professions at the moment sincere, there can be no doubt. But his temper was too hot, and his confidence in himself too great. When our Lord told him, and all the other apostles, that they would desert him that night, Peter was the first to say to him, "though all men should be offended because of thee, yet will I *never* be offended." And when Jesus again assured him, that before the cock crew he should deny him thrice, Peter insisted with still greater vehemence on his unshaken fidelity, and declared, "that though he should die with him, he should never deny him." Yet deny him he did, with execrations and oaths; and left a memorable lesson, even to the best of men, not to entertain too high an opinion of their own constancy and firmness

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in the hour of temptation. "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

And hence in the last place we see the wisdom and the necessity of looking beyond ourselves, of looking up to heaven for support and assistance in the discharge of our duty. If, when Peter was first forewarned by our Lord of his approaching denial of him, instead of repeating his professions of inviolable fidelity to him, he had with all humility confessed his weakness, and implored his divine Master to strengthen and fortify him for the trial that awaited him, the event probably would have been very different. And it is surprising that he had not learned this lesson from his former experience. For when, confiding as he did now in his own courage, he entreated Jesus to let him walk to him upon the sea, and was permitted to do so; no sooner did he find the wind boisterous than he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me! And immediately Jesus stretched forth

forth his hand, and caught him." This was a plain intimation to him (as I remarked in a former Lecture) that it was not his own arm that could help him, but that almighty hand, and that outstretched arm, which then preserved him; and to which, when in danger, we must all have recourse to preserve us from sinking. "Trust then in the Lord," (as the wise king advises) "with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths *."

* Prov. iii. 5 & 6.

LECTURE XXII.

MATTHEW xxvii.

IN the preceding chapter we saw that the chief priests and elders had, in their summary way, without the shadow of justice, without any consistent evidence, decided the fate of Jesus, and pronounced him guilty of death. Their next care was how to get this sentence confirmed and carried into execution; for under the Roman government they had not at this time the power of the sword, the power of life and death; they could not *execute* a criminal, though they might try and condemn him, without a warrant from the Roman governor; they determined therefore to carry him before

Pilate, the Roman procurator of Judæa at that time. But then, to ensure success in that quarter, it was necessary to give their accusations against Jesus such a colour and shape, as should prevail upon the governor to put him to death. For this purpose they found it expedient to change their ground, for they had condemned him for blasphemy; but this they knew would have little weight with a pagan governor, who, like Gallio, would "care for none of those things" which related solely to religion. They therefore resolved to bring him before Pilate as a *state prisoner*, and to charge him with treasonable and seditious practices; with setting himself up as a king in opposition to Cæsar, and persuading the people not to pay tribute to that prince. Accordingly we are told, in the beginning of this chapter, that "when morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death;" that is, to obtain *permission* to put him to death; "and when they had bound him

they led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor."

The evangelist, having brought the history of this diabolical transaction thus far, makes a short digression, to inform us of the fate of that wretched traitor, Judas, who had by his perfidy brought his Master into this situation.

"Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? See thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and went and hanged himself."

From the expression made use of in the third verse, "when Judas saw that Jesus was condemned, he *repented himself*," some commentators have thought that he did not imagine or expect that Jesus would be condemned to death; but supposed either that he would convey himself away from his

his persecutors, or that he would prove his innocence to the satisfaction of his judges; or that at the most some slight punishment would be inflicted upon him. One would not wish to load even the worst of men with more guilt than really belongs to them; but, from considering the character of Judas, and comparing together all the circumstances of the case, it appears to me more probable that the acquittal or condemnation of Jesus never entered into his contemplation. All he thought of was gain. He had kept the common purse, and had robbed it; and his only object was, how to obtain a sum of money, which he determined to have at all events, and left consequences to take care of themselves. But when he saw that his divine Master, whom he knew to be perfectly innocent, was actually condemned to death, his conscience then flew in his face; his guilt rose up before him in all its horrors. The innocence, the virtues, the gentleness, the kindness of his Lord, with a thousand other circumstances, rushed at once

once upon his mind, and painted to him the enormity of his crime in such dreadful colours, that he could no longer bear the agonizing tortures that racked his soul, but went immediately and destroyed himself.

The answer of the chief priests to Judas, when he brought back to them the thirty pieces of silver, and declared that he had betrayed the innocent blood, was a perfectly natural one for men of their character: "What is that to us? See thou to that." Men who had any feeling, any sentiments of common humanity, or even of common justice, when so convincing a proof of the accused person's innocence had been given them, would naturally have relented, would have put an immediate stop to the proceedings, and released the prisoner. But this was very far from entering into their plan. With the guilt or innocence of Jesus they did not concern themselves. This was not their affair. All they wanted was the destruction of a man whom they hated and

feared, and whose life and doctrine was a standing reproach to them. This was their object: and as to the mercy or the justice of the case, on this head they were at perfect ease; "What is that to us? See thou to that." And yet to see the astonishing inconsistence of human nature, and the strange contrivances by which even the most abandoned of men endeavour to satisfy their minds and quiet their apprehensions; these very men, who had no scruple at all in murdering an innocent person, yet had wonderful qualms of conscience about putting into the treasury the money which they themselves had given as the "*price of blood!*" "The chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for us to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called The Field of Blood, unto this day. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, and they took the thirty pieces

pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value, and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me *."

I cannot pass on from this part of the chapter without observing, that the short account here given us of Judas Iscariot affords us a very striking proof of the perfect innocence and integrity of our Lord's character, and of the truth of his pretensions.

Had there been any thing reprehensible in the former, or any deceit in the latter, it must have been known to Judas Iscariot. He was one of the twelve who were the constant companions of our Saviour's ministry, and witnesses to every thing he said or

* It happens that this passage is found not in Jeremiah, to which the evangelist refers, but in the eleventh chapter of Zechariah. But there are various very satisfactory ways in which learned men have accounted for this difficulty; which, after all, as the prophecy actually exists, is a matter of no moment; and in writings two or three thousand years old, it is no great wonder if, by the carelessness of transcribers, one name should sometimes (especially where abbreviations are used) be put for another.

or did. If therefore his conduct had been in any respect irregular or immoral; if his miracles had been the effect of collusion or fraud; if there had been any plan concerted between him and his disciples to impose a false religion upon the world, and under the guise of piety to gratify their love of fame, honour, wealth, or power; if, in short, Jesus had been either an enthusiast or an impostor, Judas must have been in the secret; and when he betrayed his Master, would immediately have divulged it to the world. By such a discovery, he would not only have justified his own treachery, but might probably have gratified also his ruling passion, his love of money. For there can be no doubt, that when the chief priests and rulers were industriously seeking out for evidence against Jesus, they would most gladly have purchased that of Judas at any price, however extravagant, that he chose to demand. But instead of producing any evidence *against* Jesus, he gives a voluntary and most decisive evidence in his favour. "I have

have sinned," says he, in an agony of grief; "I have sinned, and have betrayed the innocent blood." This testimony of Judas is invaluable, because it is the testimony of an unwilling witness; the testimony not of a friend, but of an enemy; the testimony, not of one desirous to favour and to befriend the accused, but of one who had actually betrayed him. After such an evidence as this, it seems impossible for any ingenuous mind either to question the reality of our Saviour's miracles, or the divinity to which he laid claim; because, as Judas declared him *innocent* (which he could not be, had he in any respect *deceived* his disciples), he must have been, what he assumed to be, the Son of God, and his religion, the word of God.

After this account of Judas Iscariot, the evangelist proceeds in the history.

"And Jesus *stood before the governor.*" Little did that governor imagine who it was that then stood before him. Little did he suspect that he must himself one day stand before the tribunal of that very

person whom he was then going to judge as a criminal!

It appears from the parallel place in St. Luke (and from what was stated in the preceding Lecture), that the charge brought against Jesus before Pilate was not what it had been before the chief priests, blasphemy, but sedition and treason. "They began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying, that he himself is Christ a king*." These were great crimes against the state, as affecting both the revenue and the sovereignty of the Roman emperor, both of which it was the duty of the governor to support and maintain. "Pilate therefore asked him, Art thou the king of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest." That is, I am what thou sayest. "And when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. Then saith Pilate unto him, Hearest thou not how many things those witness against thee?

* Luke xxiii. 2.

thee? And he answered him never a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly." Our Lord's conduct on this occasion was truly dignified. When he was called upon to acknowledge what was really true, he gave a direct answer both to the chief priests and to Pilate. He acknowledged that he was the Christ, the Son of God, the King of the Jews; but false and frivolous, and unjust accusations, he treated as they deserved, with profound and contemptuous silence.

It appears, however, from St. John, that although Jesus declared he was the King of the Jews, yet he explained to Pilate the nature of his kingdom, which he assured him was not of this world. And Pilate, satisfied with this explanation, and seeing clearly that the whole accusation was malicious and groundless, made several efforts to save Jesus. He repeatedly declared to his accusers, that having examined him, he could find no fault in him. This, however, instead of disarming their fury, only inflamed and increased it. They were

the more fierce, as St. Luke tells us, saying, "He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee, to this place*." The mention of Galilee suggested an idea to Pilate, which he flattered himself might save him the pain of condemning an innocent man. "When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilean; and as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod†." That tyrant, who was delighted to see Jesus, and was probably very well disposed to treat him as he did his precursor, John the Baptist, yet could bring no guilt home to him. He therefore sent him back to Pilate, insulted and derided, but uncondemned. Pilate, not yet discouraged, had recourse to another expedient, which he hoped might still preserve a plainly guiltless man. It was the custom, at the great feast of the Passover, for the Roman governor to gratify the Jewish people, by pardoning and releasing to them

* Luke xxiii. 5. † Id. 6, 7.

them any prisoner whom they chose to select out of those that were condemned to death. Now there happened to be at that time a notorious criminal in prison, named Barabbas, who had been guilty of exciting an insurrection, and committing murder in it. Pilate, thinking it impossible that the people could carry their malignant rage against Jesus so far as to desire the pardon of a murderer rather than of him, said unto them, "Whom will ye that I release unto you, Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ?" Had the people been left to their own unbiassed feeling, one would think that they could not have hesitated one moment in their choice. But they were under the influence of leaders (as they generally are) more wicked than themselves. For we are told, that "the chief priests and elders *persuaded* the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus *."

While this was passing, an extraordinary incident took place, which must needs have

* Matt. xxvii. 20.

have made a deep impression on the mind of Pilate. "When he was sat down upon the judgment-seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him." Anxious as Pilate already was to save Jesus, this singular circumstance coming upon him at the moment, must have greatly quickened his zeal in such a cause. He therefore redoubled his efforts to carry his point, and again said to the Jews, "Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas." Pilate still persisted, "What shall I do then with Jesus, which is called CHRIST?" that is, the Messiah, the great deliverer whom they expected; thinking this consideration might soften them. But he was mistaken; they all say unto him, "Let him be crucified." Once more he endeavoured to move their compassion, by reminding them of the perfect innocence of Jesus. The governor said unto them, "Why? what evil hath he done?" But even this last affecting

affecting remonstrance was all in vain; they cried out the more, saying, "Let him be crucified." When therefore Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it." This was a custom both among the Jews and the Romans, when they wished to exculpate themselves from the guilt of having put to death an innocent man. We meet with instances of this significant ablution in several classic writers *. The Mosaic law itself enjoined it in certain cases †; and it is in allusion to this ceremony that David says in the Psalms, "I will wash my hands in innocency, O Lord; (that is, in

* Sophocles—Ajax, iii. 1. v. 664; & Scholiast in loco. So Æneas, after having recently slaughtered so many of his enemies at the sacking of Troy by the Greeks, durst not touch his household gods, till he had washed himself in the running stream.

Me, bello è tanto digressum et cæde recenti,
Attrectare nefas; donec me flumine vivo
Abluero.————Æn, l. ii. v. 718.

† Deut. xxi. 6, 7.

in testimony of my innocence) and so will I go to thine altar *."

This therefore was at once a visible declaration of the innocence of Jesus, and of Pilate's reluctance in condemning him. To this the Jews made that answer, which must petrify every heart with horror. "Then answered all the people, and said, *His blood be on us and on our children.* Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified."

Here let us pause a moment, and look back to the scene we have been contemplating, and the reflections that arise from it.

It affords, in the first place, a most awful warning to the lower orders of the people, to beware of giving themselves up, as they too frequently do, to the direction of artful and profligate leaders, who abuse their simplicity and credulity to the very worst purposes, and make use of them only as tools, to accomplish their own private views

* Psalm xxvi. 6.

views of ambition, of avarice, of resentment, or revenge. We have just seen a most striking instance of this strange propensity of the multitude to be misled, and of the ease with which their passions are worked up to the commission of the most atrocious crimes. The Jewish people were naturally attached to Jesus. They were astonished at his miracles, they were charmed with his discourses; and their diseases and infirmities were relieved by his omnipotent benevolence. But notwithstanding all this, by the dexterous management of their chief priests and elders, their admiration of Jesus was converted in a moment into the most rancorous hatred; they were *persuaded* to ask the life of a murderer in preference to his; and to demand the destruction of a man who had never offended them, whose innocence was as clear as the day, and was repeatedly acknowledged and strongly urged upon them by the very judge who had tried him.

Yet even that judge himself, who was

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so thoroughly convinced of the innocence of his prisoner, and actually used every means in his power to preserve him, even he had not the honesty and the courage to protect him effectually; and his conduct affords a most dreadful proof what kind of a thing public justice was among the most *enlightened*, and (if we may believe their own poets and historians) the most *virtuous* people in the ancient heathen world. We see a Roman governor sent to dispense justice in a Roman province, and invested with full powers to save or to destroy; we see him with a prisoner before him, in whom he repeatedly declared he could find no fault; and yet, after a few ineffectual struggles with his own conscience, he delivers up that prisoner, not merely to death, but to the most horrible and excruciating torments that human malignity could devise. The fact is, he was afraid of the people, he was afaid of Cæsar; and when the clamorous multitude cried out to him, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's

friend," all his firmness, all his resolution at once forsook him. He shrunk from the dangers that threatened him, and sacrificed his conscience and his duty to the menaces of a mob, and the dread of sovereign power.

Could any thing like this have happened in this country? We all know that it is impossible. We all know that no dangers, no threats, no fears, either of Cæsar or of the people, could ever induce a British judge to condemn to death a man, whom he in his conscience believed to be innocent. And what is it that produces this difference between a Roman and a British judge? It is this: that the former had no other principle to govern his conduct but natural reason, or what would now be called philosophy; which, though it would sometimes point out to him the path of duty, yet could never inspire him with fortitude enough to persevere in it in critical and dangerous circumstances; in opposition to the frowns of a tyrant, or the clamours of a multitude. Whereas the

the British judge, in addition to his natural sentiments of right and wrong, and the dictates of the moral sense, has the principle of *religion* also to influence his heart: he has the unerring and inflexible rules of evangelical rectitude to guide him; he has that which will vanquish every other fear, the *fear of God*, before his eyes. He knows that he himself must one day stand before the Judge of all; and *that* consideration keeps him firm to his duty, be the dangers that surround him ever so formidable and tremendous.

This is one, among a thousand other proofs, of the benefits we derive, even in the present life, from the Christian revelation. It has, in fact, had a most salutary and beneficial influence on our most important *temporal* interests. Its beneficent spirit has spread itself through all the different relations and modifications of human society, and communicated its kindly influence to almost every public and private concern of mankind. It has not only purified, as we have seen, the

adminis-

administration of justice; but it has insensibly worked itself into the inmost frame and constitution of civil societies. It has given a tinge to the complexion of their governments, and to the temper of their laws. It has softened the rigour of despotism, and lessened, in some degree, the horrors of war. It has descended into families, has diminished the pressure of private tyranny, improved every domestic endearment, given tenderness to the parent, humanity to the master, respect to superiors, to inferiors security and ease; and left, in short, the most evident traces of its benevolent spirit in all the various subordinations, dependencies, and connexions of social life.

But to return to the Roman governor. Having thus basely shrunk from his duty, and, contrary to his own conviction, condemned an innocent man, he endeavoured to clear himself from this guilt, and to satisfy his conscience, by the vain ceremony of washing his hands before the multitude, and declaring, "that he was

innocent of the blood of that just person." Alas! not all the water of the ocean could wash away the foul and indelible stain of murder from his soul. Yet he hoped to transfer it to the accomplices of his crime. "See ye to it," says he to the people. And what answer did that people make to him? "*His blood*, said they, *be on us, and on our children.*" A most fatal imprecation, and most dreadfully fulfilled upon them at the siege of Jerusalem, when the vengeance of Heaven overtook them with a fury unexampled in the history of the world; when they were exposed at once to the horrors of famine, of sedition, of assassination, and the sword of the Romans. And it is very remarkable, that there was a striking correspondence between their crime and their punishment. They put Jesus to death, when the nation was assembled to celebrate the passover; and, when the nation was assembled for the same purpose, Titus shut them up within the walls of Jerusalem. The rejection of the true Messiah was their

crime, and the following of false Messiahs to their destruction was their punishment. They bought Jesus as a slave, and they themselves were afterwards sold and bought as slaves, at the lowest prices. They preferred a robber and murderer to Jesus, whom they crucified between two thieves; and they themselves were afterwards infested with bands of thieves and robbers. They put Jesus to death lest the Romans should come and take away their place and nation; and the Romans *did* come and take away their place and nation *. And what is still more striking, and still more strongly marks the judgment of God upon them, they were punished with that very kind of death which they were so eager to inflict on the Saviour of mankind, the death of the cross; and that in such prodigious numbers, that Josephus assures us there wanted wood for crosses, and room to place them in †.

The history then proceeds as follows; "Then

* Newton on Prophecy, vol. ii. p. 354.
† De Bell. Jud. l. v. c. xi. p. 1247. Ed. Huds.

"Then released he Barabbas unto them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified." It was the custom of the inhuman Romans to scourge their criminals before they crucified them; as if the exquisite tortures of crucifixion were not sufficient without adding to them those of the scourge. But in this instance the Roman soldiers went further still; they improved upon the cruelty of their masters, and to torments they added the most brutal mockery and insult. "Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers; and they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, king of the Jews! And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. And after they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away

away to be crucified." One hastens over this scene of insolence and outrage with averted eyes, and can hardly bring one's mind to believe that any thing in the shape of man could have risen to this height of wanton barbarity. What a difference between this treatment of an innocent and injured man; to that of the vilest criminal in this country previous to his execution; and how strongly does it mark the difference between the spirit of Paganism and the spirit of Christianity! "And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross." It was usual for criminals to bear their own cross; but when they were feeble (as the blessed Jesus might well be after all his bitter sufferings) they compelled some one to bear it for him; and this Cyrenian was probably known to be a favourer of Christ. "And when they were come to a place called Golgotha, they gave him vinegar to drink, mingled with gall;" a kind of stupefying potion, intended to abate the sense of pain, and to

hasten death. "And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots." This is a prediction of king David's, in the 22d Psalm. "And sitting down, they watched him there; and set up over him his accusation, written, *This is Jesus, the King of the Jews:*" for in extraordinary cases it was usual to place such inscriptions over the criminal. But with regard to this, a remarkable circumstance occurred. We learn from St. John, that many of the Jews read this inscription, which gave them infinite offence; as being a declaration to all the world that Jesus really *was* their king. The chief priests therefore came to Pilate, and begged of him to alter the inscription; and instead of writing, "This *is* the King of the Jews," to write, "He *said*, I am the King of the Jews." Pilate who put up this inscription out of mockery, now retained it, like a true Roman, out of obstinacy.

"What

"What I have written, (says he, peevishly) I have written;" and it *shall* stand; unconscious of what he was saying, and of his being overruled all the while by an unseen hand, which thus compelled him to bear an undesigned testimony to a most important truth; that the very man whom he had crucified as a malefactor, did not merely *say* that he was the king of the Jews, the true Messiah, but that he really *was* so.

"Then were two thieves crucified with him, the one on the right hand, the other on the left. This was done with a view of adding to the ignominy of our Saviour's sufferings. But this act of malignity, like many other instances of the same nature, answered a purpose which the authors of it little thought of or intended. It was the completion of a prophecy of Isaiah, in which, alluding to this very transaction, he says of the Messiah, "he was numbered with the transgressors *." They then continued their insults upon him, even while

* Isaiah liii. 12.

while hanging in agony upon the cross, as we find related in the five following verses: We are then told, that "from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour." The sixth hour of the Jews corresponds to our twelve o'clock, and their ninth hour of course to our three. There was therefore a darkness over all the earth, from twelve at noon till three in the afternoon. This darkness must have been supernatural and miraculous. It could not be an eclipse of the sun, because that cannot happen but in the new moon; whereas this was at the feast of the Passover, which was always celebrated at the full moon. It is taken notice of by several ancient writers, both Heathen and Christian; and Tertullian expressly declares, that it was mentioned in the Roman archives*. From whence it appears, that it was not confined to the land of Judæa, but extended itself, as it is expressed by St. Luke, *over all the earth*†.

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with

* Tertull. Apol. c. 21. † Luke xxiii. 44.

with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is to say, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" We are not from hence to imagine, that Jesus meant by these words to express any distrust of God's favour and kindness towards him, or any apprehension that the light of his countenance was withdrawn from him. This was impossible. He well knew, that under that load of affliction which, for the salvation of mankind, he voluntarily took upon himself, he was still his heavenly Father's "beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased." These expressions, therefore, of seeming despondence, were nothing more than the natural and almost unavoidable effusions of a mind tortured with the acutest pain, and hardly conscious of the complaints it uttered; of which many similar instances occur in the Psalms. Indeed these words themselves are the beginning of the 22d Psalm, which perhaps our Lord recited throughout, or at least undoubtedly meant to apply the whole of it to himself. And this very

Psalm,

Psalm, although in the outset it breathes an air of dejection and complaint, yet ends in expressing the firmest trust in the mercy and the protection of God. And our Lord himself, when he breathed his last, committed himself with boundless confidence to the care of the Almighty: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit *."

Then some of them that stood there, when they heard him crying out "Eli, Eli," deceived by the similitude of the sound, said, "This man calleth for Elias. And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink." This, as St. John tells us, was done in consequence of Jesus saying, "I thirst." The rest said, "Let be; let us see whether Elias will come to save him." "Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, gave up the ghost." This was about the ninth hour, or three in the afternoon. And as he was crucified at the third hour, or at nine in the

* Luke xxiii. 46.

the morning, he had hung no less than six hours in agonies upon the cross. And this, let it never be forgotten, was for us men, and for our salvation! "And behold, the vail of the temple was rent in twain, from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept, arose and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many."

Such were the convulsions into which the whole frame of nature was thrown, when the Lord of all yielded up his life.

The vail of the temple we are told, in the first place, was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.

The Jewish temple was divided into several parts; the most sacred was called the Holiest, or the *Holy of Holies*, into which none but the high-priest might enter, and that only once in a year. It was considered as a type of heaven; and was separated from what was called the holy place,

place, or the place where divine worship was celebrated, by a curtain of rich tapestry, which is here called the vail of the Temple. This vail, when our Saviour expired, was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; by which was signified the abolition of the whole Mosaic ritual, the removal of the partition between Jew and Gentile, and the admission of the latter (on the terms of the Gospel covenant) into heaven, or the *Holy of Holies*. "And the earth did quake, and the rocks rent." This earthquake is mentioned by heathen authors as having, in the reign of Tiberius, destroyed twelve cities in Asia *. "And the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints which slept, arose and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many." Who the holy persons were which then arose from their graves must be matter of mere conjecture; but most probably some of those who had believed

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* Taciti Annal. l. ii. c. 37. Suet. in Tib. vi. 448. Plin. Nat. Hist. l. ii. c. 84.

in Christ, such as old Simeon, and whose persons were known in the city.

Now when the centurion, and they that were with him watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly; saying, "Truly this was the Son of God."

The centurion here mentioned was the Roman captain, who, with a guard of soldiers, was ordered to attend the crucifixion of Jesus, and see the sentence executed. He placed himself, as St. Mark informs us, over against Jesus. From that station he kept his eye constantly fixed upon him, and observed with attention every thing he said or did. And when he saw the meekness, the patience, the resignation, the firmness, with which our Lord endured the most excruciating torments; when he heard him at one time fervently praying for his murderers, at another disposing with dignity and authority of a place in Paradise to one of his fellow-sufferers; and at length, with that confidence, which nothing but conscious virtue and conscious

dignity

dignity could at such a time inspire, recommending his spirit into the hands of his heavenly Father; he could not but conclude him to be a most extraordinary person, and something more than human. But when, moreover, he observed the astonishing events that took place when Jesus expired; the agitation into which the whole frame of nature seemed to be thrown; the supernatural darkness, the earthquake, the rending of rocks, the opening of graves; he then burst out involuntarily into that striking exclamation, "Truly this was the Son of God."

Here then we have a testimony to the divine character of our Lord, which must be considered as in the highest degree impartial and incorrupt; the honest unsolicited testimony of a plain man, a soldier and a heathen; the testimony, not of one who was prejudiced in favour of Christ and his religion, but of one who, by habit and education, was probably strongly prejudiced against them.

And it is not a little remarkable, that the

the contemplation of the very same scene which so forcibly struck the Roman centurion, has extorted a similar confession from one of the most eloquent of modern sceptics, who has never been accused of too much credulity, and who, though he could bring himself to resist the evidence both of prophecy and of miracles, and was therefore certainly no bigot to Christianity, yet was overwhelmed with the evidence arising from the character, the sufferings, and the death of Jesus. I allude to the celebrated comparison between the death of Socrates and the death of Jesus, drawn by the masterly pen of Rousseau. The passage is probably well known to a large part of this audience; but it affords so forcible and so unprejudiced a testimony to the divinity of Christ, and bears so striking a resemblance to that of the centurion, that I shall be pardoned, I trust, for bringing it once more to your recollection, and introducing it here as the conclusion of this Lecture.

"Where

"Where (says he) is the man, where is the philosopher, who can act, suffer, and die, without weakness, and without ostentation? When Plato describes his imaginary just man, covered with all the opprobrium of guilt, yet at the same time meriting the sublimest rewards of virtue, he paints precisely every feature in the character of Jesus Christ. The resemblance is so striking that all the fathers have observed it, and it is impossible to be deceived in it. What prejudice, what blindness must possess the mind of that man, who *dares* to compare the son of Sophroniscus with the Son of Mary! What a distance is there between the one and the other! The death of Socrates, philosophizing calmly with his friends, is the most gentle that can be wished; that of Jesus expiring in torments, insulted, derided, and reviled by all the people, the most horrible that can be imagined. Socrates, taking the poisoned cup, blesses the man who presents it to him; and who, in the very

very act of presenting it, melts into tears. Jesus, in the midst of the most agonizing tortures, prays for his enraged persecutors. Yes, if the life and death of Socrates are those of a sage, the life and death of Jesus are those of a GOD."

LECTURE XXIII.

MATTHEW xxvii.—xxviii.

IN the preceding Lecture we closed the dismal scene of our Lord's unparalleled sufferings; on which it is impossible to reflect without astonishment and horror, and without asking ourselves this question, Whence came it to pass that so innocent, so excellent, so divine a person as the beloved Son of God, in whom he was well pleased, should be permitted by his heavenly Father to be exposed to such indignities and cruelties, and finally to undergo the exquisite torments of the cross? The answer is, that the occasion of all this is to be sought for in our own sinful nature, in the depravity and corruption of the human heart, in the extreme

wickedness of every kind which overspread the whole world at the time of our Lord's appearance upon earth, and which must necessarily have subjected the whole human race to the severest effects of the divine displeasure, had not some atonement, some expiation, some satisfaction to their offended Maker, been interposed between them and the punishment so justly due to them. This expiation, this atonement, the Son of God himself voluntarily consented to become, and paid the ransom required for our deliverance by his own death upon the cross. "He gave himself for us, as the Scriptures express it, an offering and a sacrifice to God. He was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. He suffered for sin, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; with his stripes we were healed. In his own blood he washed us from our sins; in his own body he bore our sins upon the tree, that we being dead unto sin

might live unto righteousness*." This is that great doctrine of REDEMPTION, which is so fully explained and so strongly insisted on in various parts of the sacred writings, which forms so essential a part of the Christian system, and is the grand foundation of all our hopes of pardon and acceptance at the great day of retribution.

This mode of vicarious punishment, this substitution of an innocent victim in the room of an offending person, can be no surprise to any one that reflects on the well-known practice of animal sacrifices for the expiation of guilt, which prevailed universally, not only among the Jews, but throughout the whole heathen world; and which evidently proves it to have been the established opinion of mankind, that (as the apostle expresses it) "without blood there could be no remission †."

Still it must be acknowledged, that in the

* Ephes. v. 2. Rev. xiii. 8. 1 Pet. iii. 18. Isa. liii. 5. Rev. i. 5. 1 Pet. ii. 24

† Heb. ix. 22.

the stupendous work of our redemption, there is something far beyond the power of our limited faculties to comprehend.

That the Son of God himself should feel such compassion for the human race, for the wretched inhabitants of this small spot in the vast system of the universe, as voluntarily to undertake the great and arduous and painful task of rescuing them from sin and misery, and eternal death; that for this purpose he should condescend to quit the bosom of his Father and the joys of heaven; should divest himself of the glory that he had before the world began; should not only take upon himself the nature of man, but the form of a servant; should submit to a low and indigent condition, to indignities, to injuries and insults, and at length to a disgraceful and excruciating death, is indeed a mystery, but it is a mystery of kindness and of mercy; it is, as the apostle truly calls it, "a love that passeth knowledge*;" a degree of tenderness, pity, and condescension,

* Ephes. iii. 19.

scension, to which we have neither words nor conceptions in any degree equal. It is impossible for us not to cry out on this occasion with the Psalmist, "Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him*?"

But what effect should this reflection have upon our hearts? Should it dispose us to join with the disputer of this world in doubting or denying the wisdom of the Almighty in the mode of our redemption, and in quarrelling with the means he has made use of to save us, because they appear to our weak understanding strange and unaccountable? Shall the man who is sinking under a mortal disease refuse the medicine which will infallibly restore him, because he is ignorant of the ingredients of which it is composed? Shall the criminal who is condemned to death reject the pardon that is unexpectedly offered to him, because he cannot conceive in what manner and by what means it

* Psalm viii. 4

it was obtained for him? Shall we, who are all criminals in the sight of God, and are all actually (till redeemed by Christ) under the sentence of death; shall we strike back the arm that is graciously stretched out to save us, merely because the mercy offered to us is so great that we are unable to grasp with our understanding the whole nature and extent of it? Shall the very magnitude, in short, of the favour conferred upon us, be converted into an argument against receiving it; and shall we determine not to be saved because God chuses to do it, not in our way, but his own? That our redemption by Christ is a mystery, a great and astonishing mystery, we readily acknowledge. But this was naturally to be expected in a work of such infinite difficulty as that of rendering the mercy of God in pardoning mankind, consistent with the exercise of his justice, and the support of his authority, as the moral Governor of the world. Whatever could effect this, must necessarily be something far beyond

the comprehension of our narrow understandings; that is, must necessarily be mysterious. And therefore this very circumstance, instead of shocking our reason, and staggering our faith, ought to confirm the one, and satisfy the other.

After the crucifixion of our Lord follows the account of his burial by Joseph of Arimathea, who went to Pilate and begged the body of Jesus; and having obtained it, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed. On this I shall make no other observation than that it was the exact fulfilment of a prophecy in Isaiah, where, speaking of the promised Messiah, or Christ, it is said, "he shall make his grave with the rich *." And accordingly Joseph, we are told, was a rich man, and an honourable counsellor †.

Now the next day that followed the day of the preparation (that is, on the Saturday),

* Isaiah liii. 9. † Matt. xxvii. 57. Mark xv. 43.

Saturday), the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, "Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, after three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away, and say unto the people, he is risen from the dead; so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch, go your way, make it as sure as you can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone and setting a watch *."

Here we see the chief priests using every possible precaution to prevent a fraud. For this purpose they went to Pilate to beg for a guard, immediately after our Lord was buried. It is indeed here said that they went *the next day that followed the day of the preparation*, the day on which Jesus was crucified. This looks, at the first view, as if the sepulchre had remained one whole night without a guard. But

* Matt. xxvii. 62—66.

But this was not so. The chief priests went to Pilate as soon as the sun was set on Friday, the day of the preparation and crucifixion; for then began the following day, or Saturday; as the Jews always began to reckon their day from the preceding evening. They had a guard therefore as soon as they possibly could, after the body was deposited in the sepulchre: and one cannot help admiring the wisdom of Providence in so disposing events, that the extreme anxiety of these men, to prevent collusion, should be the means of adding the testimony of sixty unexceptionable witnesses (the number of the Roman soldiers on guard) to the truth of the resurrection, and of establishing the reality of it beyond all power of contradiction. It is only necessary to add on this head, that the circumstance of sealing the stone was a precaution of which several instances occur in ancient times, particularly in the prophecy of Daniel, where we read, that when Daniel was thrown into the den of lions, a stone was brought

brought and laid upon the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords, that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel *.

The chief priests, having taken these precautions, waited probably with no small impatience for the third day after the crucifixion, when Jesus had foretold that he should rise again, but when they made no doubt, that they should find the body in the sepulchre, and convict him of deceit and imposture.

On the other hand, it might naturally be imagined that the disciples, after having received from their Lord repeated assurances that he would rise on the third day from the dead, would anxiously look for the arrival of that day, with a certain confidence that these promises would be fulfilled, and that they should see their beloved Master rescued from the grave, and restored to life.

But this seems to have been by no means

* Daniel vi. 17.

means the real state of their minds. It does not appear that they entertained any hopes of Jesus' resurrection. Shocked and confounded, and dismayed at finding him condemned to the ignominious death of the cross, they forgot every thing he had said to them respecting his rising again. When therefore he was led to punishment, they all forsook him, and fled. Most of them seem to have kept themselves concealed during the whole time of Jesus' being in the grave, and to have given themselves up to sorrow and despair. They had not even the courage or the curiosity to go to the sepulchre on the third day, to see whether the promised event had taken place or not. When two of them going to Emmaus met Jesus, their conversation plainly showed that they were disappointed in their expectations, "We trusted (said they) that it had been he which should have delivered Israel*;" and when the women who had been at the sepulchre told the apostles that

* Luke xxiv. 21.

that Jesus was risen, "their words seemed to them as *idle tales*, and they believed them not*."

The women, it is true, came to the sepulchre early in the morning of the third day; but they came to embalm the dead body, and of course not with the hope of seeing a living one.

So far then is perfectly clear, that the disciples were not at all disposed to be *over-credulous* on this occasion. Their prejudices and prepossessions lay the contrary way; and nothing but the most irresistible evidence would be able to convince them of a fact, which they appeared to think in the highest degree improbable.

Let us now then see what this evidence of the resurrection was. In the beginning of the 28th chapter, on which we are now entering, St. Matthew informs us, "that in the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn towards the first day of the week, that is, according to our way of reckoning, very early on the Sunday morning (our Lord

* Luke xxiv. 11.

Lord having been crucified on the Friday) came Mary Magdalen, and the other Mary, the mother of James and Joses, to see the sepulchre; and, as we learn from the other evangelists, they brought with them the spices they had purchased to embalm the body of Jesus. And behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered, and said unto the women, Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified. He is not here; for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where our Lord lay; and go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there ye shall see him. Lo! I have told you. And they departed from the sepulchre with fear and great joy, and did run to bring his

his disciples word. And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, *All hail*; and they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid. Go, tell my brethren, that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me *."

This is the relation given by St. Matthew of our Lord's first appearance, after his resurrection, to the women who came to the sepulchre. The accounts given by the other three evangelists are substantially the same, though differing in a few minute circumstances of no moment; which however have been very ably reconciled by many learned men. I shall therefore wave all discussions of this kind, and confine myself to the main fact of the resurrection, in which all the evangelists agree, and of which the proofs are numerous and clear.

The principal and most obvious are those which arise from the various appear-

ances

* Matt. xxviii. 1—10.

ances which Jesus made after his resurrection to various persons, and at various times.

The first was to Mary Magdalèn alone *.

The second, to her in company with several other women, as we have just seen †.

The third, to Peter ‡.

The fourth, to the two disciples going to Emmaus §.

The fifth, to the apostles in Jerusalem, when they were assembled with the doors shut on the first day of the week; at which time he showed them his hands and his feet, pierced with the nails; and did eat before them ‖.

The sixth, to the apostles a second time as they sat at meat, when he satisfied the doubts of the incredulous Thomas, by making him thrust his hand into his side ¶.

The seventh, to Peter and several of his disciples

* Mark xvi. 9. † Matt. xxviii. 9.
‡ 1 Cor. xv. 5. § Luke xxiv. 13.
‖ John xx. 19. Luke xxiv. 37—43.
¶ John xx. 26.

disciples at the lake of Tiberias, when he also ate with them *.

The eighth, and last, was to above five hundred brethren at once †.

There are then no less than eight distinct appearances of our Lord to his disciples after his resurrection, recorded by the sacred historians. And can we believe that all those different persons could be deceived in these appearances of one, whose countenance, figure, voice, and manner, they had for so long a time been perfectly well acquainted with; and who now, not merely presented himself to their view transiently and silently, but ate and drank and conversed with them, and suffered them to touch and examine him thoroughly, that they might be convinced by all their senses that it was truly their beloved Master, and not a spirit that conversed with them. In all this surely it is impossible that there could be any delusion or imposition. Was it then a tale invented by the disciples to impose upon others?

* John xxi. 1. † 1 Cor. xv. 6.

others? Why they should do this it is not easy to conceive; because it would have been an imposition, not only on others, but on themselves. It would have been an attempt to persuade themselves that their Master was risen, when he really was not; from whence no possible benefit could arise to them, but, on the contrary, grief, disappointment, and mortification in the extreme. But beside this, the narratives themselves of this great event bear upon the very face of them the strongest marks of reality and truth. They describe, in so natural a manner, the various emotions of the disciples on their first hearing of our Lord's resurrection, that no one who is acquainted with the genuine workings of the human mind, can possibly suspect any thing like fraud in the case. When the women were first told by the angels that Christ was risen, and were ordered to tell the disciples, they departed quickly from the sepulchre *with fear and great joy**; with joy at the unexpected good news

* Matt. xxviii. 8.

news they had just heard; and with fear, not only from the sight of the angel, but lest the glad tidings he had told them should not prove true. They therefore "trembled, and were amazed, and ran to bring the disciples word; neither said they any thing to any man, for they were afraid *." And when they told these things to the apostles, their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not †. When Jesus himself appeared to the apostles at Jerusalem, they were terrified and affrighted, and thought they had seen a spirit; and they believed not for joy, and wondered ‡. When he appeared again unto the eleven as they sat at meat, they were so incredulous that he upbraided them with their unbelief §, and Thomas would not be convinced without thrusting his hand into his side ‖. This certainly was not the behaviour of men who were fabricating an artful story, to impose upon the

* Mark xvi. 8. † Luke xxiv. 11.
‡ Luke xxiv. 37—41. § Mark xvi. 14.
‖ John xx. 27.

the world, but of men who were themselves astonished, and overpowered with an event which they did not in the least expect, and which it was with the utmost difficulty they could be brought to believe.

The account therefore of the resurrection, given by the evangelists, may safely be relied upon as true.

It may however be said, that this account is the representation of friends, of those who were interested in asserting the reality of a resurrection; but that there is probably another story told by the opposite party, by the Jews and the Romans, which may set the matter in a very different point of view; and that before we can judge fairly of the question, we must hear what these have to say upon it as well as the evangelists. This is certainly very proper and reasonable. There *is*, we acknowledge, another account given by the Jews respecting the resurrection of Christ: and, to show the perfect fairness and impartiality of the sacred historians, and how little they wish to shrink from

the severest investigation of the truth, they themselves tell us what this opposite story was. In the 11th verse of this chapter, St. Matthew informs us, "that as the women were going to tell the disciples that Jesus was risen, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, his disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught. And this saying is commonly reported among the Jews unto this day."

This then is the statement of our adversaries, produced in opposition to that of the evangelists; which the latter simply relate, without any observation upon it, without condescending to make the slightest answer to it, but leaving every man to judge of it for himself. And this

indeed they might safely do; for it is a fabrication too gross and too palpable to impose on any man of common sense. If any person can bring himself to believe that sixty Roman soldiers should be all sleeping at the same time on guard; that they should be able to tell what was done in their sleep; that they should have the boldness to confess that they slept upon their post, when they knew the punishment of such an offence to be death; and that the disciples should be so devoid of all common sense as to steal away a dead body, which could not be of the smallest use to them, and, instead of proving a resurrection, was a standing proof against it; if any man, I say, can prevail on himself to listen for a moment to such absurdities as these, he may then give credit to the tale of the soldiers: but otherwise must treat it, as it truly deserves, with the most sovereign contempt.

This senseless forgery, then, being set aside, and the body of Jesus being gone, and yet *never having been produced* by the

Jews or Romans; there remains only the alternative of *a real resurrection*.

But besides the positive proofs of this fact which have been here stated, there is a presumptive one of the most forcible nature, to which I have never yet seen any answer, and am of opinion that none can be given. The proof I allude to is that which is drawn from the sudden and astonishing change which took place in the language and the conduct of the apostles, immediately after the period when they affirmed that Jesus had risen from the dead. From being, as we have seen, timorous and dejected, and discouraged at the death of their Master, they suddenly became courageous, undaunted, and intrepid: and they boldly preached that very Jesus, whom before they had deserted in his greatest distress. This observation will apply, in some degree, to all the apostles; but with regard to St. Peter more particularly, it holds with peculiar force.

One of the most prominent features in

the character of St. Peter (a character most admirably portrayed by the evangelists) is timidity of disposition. We see it in the terror that seized him when he was walking on the sea; we see it in his deserting his divine Master when he was apprehended; then turning back to follow him, but following at a distance; not daring to go into the council-chamber when he was examined, but staying in the outer court with the servants; and at length, when he was challenged as one of his disciples, denying three times with the most dreadful oaths and imprecations that he knew any thing of him, or had the slightest connexion with him.

This is the point of view in which St. Peter presents himself to us just before our Lord's crucifixion.

Turn now to the fourth chapter of the Acts, and see what his language *then* was, after Jesus had actually been put to death.

He and John, having healed the lame man whom they found sitting at the gate of

of the temple, were apprehended, and thrown into prison, and the next day were called upon to answer for their conduct before the high priest, and the other chief rulers of the Jews. And upon being questioned by what power and by what name they had performed this miraculous cure, Peter answered them in these resolute terms: "Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, if we be this day examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole, be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought by you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other. For there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved*." And when, soon after this, Peter and John were,

* Acts iv. 8. 12.

were straitly threatened, and commanded not to speak at all, or teach, in the name of Jesus, they answered and said unto them, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard *."

What now is this that we hear? Is this the man who, but a short time before, had shamefully renounced his divine Master, and declared, with the utmost vehemence and passion, that he was utterly unknown to him? And does this same man now, after the crucifixion of his Lord, and when he himself was a prisoner, and had reason to expect a similar fate, does this man boldly tell those in whose power he was, that by the name of this very Jesus he had healed the lame man? Does he dare to reprove them with having crucified the Lord of life? Does he dare to tell them that God had raised him from the dead; that there was no other name under heaven

* Acts iv. 18. 20.

heaven by which they could be saved; and that, in defiance of all their interdictions and all their menaces, he must and would still continue to speak what he had seen and heard?

In what manner shall we account for this sudden and astonishing alteration in the language of St. Peter? There is, I will venture to assert, no other possible way of accounting for it, but from that very circumstance which St. Peter himself mentions in his speech to the high priest, namely, "that he whom they had crucified was, by the almighty power of God, raised from the dead*." It was this change in the condition of his divine Master, which produced a correspondent change in the character and conduct of St. Peter. It was this miracle of our Lord's resurrection, which could alone have produced the almost equally astonishing miracle of St. Peter's complete transformation. Had Jesus never risen from the dead, as he had repeatedly promised to do,

* Acts iv. 10.

do, he would have been a deceiver and an impostor; and that St. Peter, knowing this, should openly and boldly profess himself his disciple when *dead*, after having most peremptorily denied him and disclaimed all knowledge of him when *living*, and should expose himself to the most dreadful dangers in asserting a fact which he knew to be false, and for the sake of a man who had most cruelly deceived and disappointed him, is a supposition utterly repugnant to every principle of human nature, and every dictate of common sense, and an absurdity too gross for the most determined infidel to maintain.

We have here then one more proof, in addition to all the rest, of the resurrection of Christ, intelligible to the lowest, and convincing to the most improved understanding. And that this was the great decisive fact which operated so surprising a revolution in the mind of St. Peter, is still further confirmed by the stress which he himself laid upon it, in his answer to the high priest, and by the constant appeal which

which he and all the other apostles made to this argument, in preference to every other; for we are told, that "with great power gave the apostles witness of the *resurrection* of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all*." And St. Paul goes so far as to make the belief of this single article the main ground and basis of our salvation: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved†." The reason of this is, because the belief of the resurrection of Christ unavoidably leads to the belief of the whole Christian religion, to the truth of which God set his seal, by raising the author of it from the dead; and the belief of the Christian revelation, if genuine and sincere, will, with the blessing of God on our own strenuous exertions, produce all those Christian graces and virtues, which, through the merits of our Redeemer, will render our final calling and election sure.

The

* Acts iv. 33. † Rom. x. 9.

The resurrection of Christ being thus established on the firmest grounds, the conclusions to be drawn from it are many and important: but I shall at present confine myself to two of them, which seem more particularly to deserve our notice.

The first is, that this great event of the resurrection affords a clear and decisive proof that Jesus was what he pretended to be, THE SON OF GOD; that the religion he taught came from God; that consequently every doctrine he delivered ought to be believed, every command he gave to be obeyed, and that every thing he promised or threatened will certainly come to pass. For had not his pretensions been well founded, and his religion true, it is impossible that the God of truth could have given them the sanction of his authority, by raising him from the dead. But by doing this, he gave the strongest possible attestation to the reality of his divine mission.

The next inference from this fact is, that the resurrection of Christ is an earnest, a pledge,

pledge, and a proof of our own. He had promised his disciples, "that where he was, there should they be also:" and the Scriptures in numberless places assure us, that we shall rise again from the grave, and become immortal. Now these promises receive the strongest confirmation from his resurrection, which shows, in the most striking and sensible manner, that our bodies are *capable* of being raised to life again, and that God will actually reanimate them, as he did that of Jesus. In this, our Saviour acted conformably to the spirit and genius of his religion, and to his constant method of teaching, which was, to instruct mankind by facts rather than by words. It was his intention (and thanks be to God that it was) that our faith should stand, not in the wisdom or eloquence of man, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power. He went about, therefore, not only preaching the word, but doing good, doing good miraculously, making the principles and the evidences of his religion palpable to the

senses

senses of mankind. When John sent to know whether he was the expected Messiah or no, Jesus, instead of entering into a long and laboured proof of his divinity, took the more compendious and convincing way of proving his point, by performing in that instant many miraculous cures, and then referring the Baptist to what his messengers had seen and heard *. In the very same manner, in the present instance, the assurance he gave us of our resurrection was not speculative and argumentative, but practical and visible. A thousand objections might have been formed by the fashionable philosophers of that age against the possibility of restoring breath to a dead body, and raising it alive again from the grave. Our Lord could very easily have shown, by unanswerable arguments, the futility and absurdity of any such objections. But the disputers of this world would have cavilled and objected without end. And therefore, to put an effectual stop to all such idle controversy, and

* Matt. xi. 4.

and to convince all the world that it was not a thing *incredible* that God should raise the dead, he himself rose again from the grave, and became the first fruits of them that slept. He triumphed over death; he threw open the gates of everlasting life: and whoever treads in his steps as nearly as they can through life, shall follow him through death into those blessed regions, where he is gone before to prepare a place for such as love and imitate him. "For if the Spirit of him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you *."

Since then we have such expectations and such hopes; what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness? The ancient heathen might say, the unbelieving libertine may still say, Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die; let us enjoy, without reserve, and without measure, all the pleasures which

* Rom. viii. 11.

which this world affords, for to-morrow we may leave it, and we know of no other. But how absurd would it be for the *Christian* to say this, how mad would it be for him to act accordingly, when he knows, that though to-morrow his soul may be separated from his body, yet that they will be again united, and live for ever in a future state of existence! What an amazing difference does this fact make in our circumstances, and how inexcusable shall we be, if it does not produce a suitable difference in our conduct! Even the *possibility* of such an event must have a powerful influence over our minds and manners; what then must be the case when it amounts, as it does with every sincere believer in the Gospel, to *absolute certainty?* With what cheerfulness shall we acquiesce under poverty and misfortunes, when we reflect that if we bear them patiently, and hold fast our integrity, these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, shall work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory! With what

what indifference shall we contemplate the charms of wealth and power, with what horror shall we turn away from the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season, when we know that the one *may*, and the other most certainly *will*, cut us off from an eternal and invaluable inheritance!

Suppose yourselves for a moment in some foreign kingdom, where, after having been obliged to spend many years, you are at length suffered to return to your own country. Suppose further, that in this country you have left families that are infinitely dear to you, friends whom you exceedingly love and esteem, wealth and honours to the utmost extent of your wishes. When, with the most impatient longings after all these blessings, you set out upon your return to your native land, will any allurements that you meet with on the road tempt you from your main object? Will any accidental hardships or inconveniencies deter you from pursuing your journey? Will you not break through all obstructions, resist all temptations, and

press forwards with alacrity and vigour towards your beloved home? And why then will you not seek your *heavenly* country with the same ardour and perseverance that you would your *earthly* one? You are all "strangers and pilgrims upon earth." This world is not your home, though you are too apt to think it so. You belong to another city, you are subjects of a better kingdom, where infinitely greater joys await you than have been just described, or can by the utmost stretch of imagination be conceived. Every day you live, every moment you breathe, brings you nearer to this country; and the grave itself, dismal as it appears, is nothing more than the gate that leads you into it.

Conscious then of the dignity and importance of our high and heavenly calling, which renders us candidates for the kingdom of God, and heirs of immortality, let us persevere steadily and uniformly in our progress towards those celestial mansions which are prepared for all the faithful servants of Christ; where we shall be released

released from all the endless anxieties, the vain hopes, and causeless fears that now agitate and disquiet us; and shall, through the merits of our Redeemer, be rewarded, not merely with uninterrupted tranquillity and repose (the utmost felicity of the pagan elysium); not merely with a visionary posthumous reputation, which commences not till we are incapable of enjoying it; but with a crown of glory that fadeth not away, a *real* immortality in the kingdom of our Father and our God.

LECTURE XXIV.

MATTHEW xxviii.

THE last Lecture ended with the history of our Lord's resurrection. The evangelist then proceeds to give a concise account of what passed after that great event had taken place.

"Then (says he) the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain, where Jesus had appointed them *."

By the eleven disciples he means the apostles, who, though originally twelve, were now reduced to eleven, by the defection and death of Judas. These Jesus had commanded to meet him in Galilee. "Go, tell my brethren, (says he to the women) that they go into Galilee, and there

* Matt. xxviii. 16.

there shall they see me." There therefore the apostles went about eight days after the resurrection, and many others with them; for this probably was the time and the place when he showed himself to about five hundred brethren at once. "And when they saw him they worshipped him; but some doubted." Here we have the authority of the apostles themselves for the worship of Christ. The women, when they first saw Jesus, paid him the same adoration: "they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him *." But some, it is added, doubted. And where can be the wonder, if among five hundred persons there should be two or three, who, like the disciples mentioned by St. Luke †, believed not for joy, and wondered; that is (as is very natural) were afraid to believe what they so ardently wished to be true; or who, like St. Thomas, would not believe, unless they touched the body of Jesus, and thrust their hands into his side. But their doubts, like

* Matt. xxviii. 9. † Ch. xxiv. 41.

like his, were probably soon removed. This circumstance therefore only serves to show the scrupulous fidelity of the sacred historians, who, like honest men, fairly tell you every thing that passed on this and on similar occasions, whether it appears to make for them or against them.

"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."

In his divine nature he had this power from all eternity; but it was now to be exercised in his human nature also, which, from a state of humiliation, from *the form of a servant*, was soon to be exalted to the highest dignity, and placed at the right hand of God. Accordingly St. Paul informs us, that "God raised our Lord from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but in that which is to come; and put all

things

things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all *." And again, in his Epistle to the Philippians, he says, that "God has highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father †." In the same magnificent language he is spoken of in the book of Revelations: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." And again, "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever ‡."

Such is the dignity of the Lord and Master

* Ephes. i. 20—23. † Philipp. ii. 9—11.
‡ Rev. v. 12, 13.

Master whom we serve; and such is that authority with which, in the two concluding verses of this chapter, he gives his last command to his apostles: "Go ye, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatever I have commanded you: and lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

The ceremony then by which our Lord's disciples were to be admitted into his religion, was baptism. This was sometimes used by the Jews on the admission of proselytes, and by the heathens on initiation into their mysteries. But the baptism of Christians was to be accompanied with a peculiar form of words, which distinguished it from every other. They were to be baptized *in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.* This form of words has accordingly been used in the Christian church from the earliest times down to the present; and is, as you all know, the mode of baptism adopted and constantly

constantly practised by the Church of England; and it is remarkable, not only on this account, but as being also one principal ground of a very distinguished doctrine of the Gospel, and of the Church of England, the doctrine of the Trinity. For the plain and natural interpretation of the words is, that by being baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, we are dedicated and consecrated equally to the service of each of those three divine persons; we are made the servants and disciples of each, and are consequently bound to honour, worship, and obey each of them equally. This evidently implies an equality in their nature; "that all the fulness of the Godhead dwells in each." In confirmation of this, we find in various parts of Scripture, that all the attributes of divinity are ascribed to each. And yet, as the unity of the Supreme Being is every where taught in the same Scriptures, and is a fundamental article of our religion, we are naturally led to conclude with our church

church in its first article, "That there is but one living and true God, of infinite power and wisdom, the maker and preserver of all things visible and invisible; and that, in the unity of this Godhead, there are three persons, of one substance, power and eternity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

That this is a very mysterious doctrine we do not deny; but it is not more so than many other doctrines of the Christian revelation, which we all admit, and which we cannot reject without subverting the foundation, and destroying the very substance and essence of our religion. The miraculous birth and incarnation of our blessed Lord, his union of the human nature with the divine, his redemption of mankind, and his expiation of their sins by his death upon the cross; these are doctrines plainly taught in Scripture, and yet as incomprehensible to our finite understandings as the doctrine of three persons and one God. But what we contend for in all these instances is, that these

mysteries,

mysteries, although confessedly *above* our reason, are not *contrary* to it. This is a plain and a well-known distinction, and in the present case an incontrovertible one. No one, for instance, can say, that the supposition of three persons and one God is contrary to reason. We cannot, indeed, *comprehend* such a distinction in the divine nature; but unless we knew *perfectly* what that nature is, it is impossible for us to say that such a distinction may not subsist in it consistent with its unity. The truth is, on a subject where we have no clear ideas at all, our reasoning faculties *must* fail us, and we must be content to submit (as well we may) to the clear and explicit declarations of holy writ. It is, indeed, natural for the human mind to wish that every thing in religion should be intelligible and plain, and that there should be no difficulties to perplex and stagger our faith. But natural as this wish may be, is it a reasonable one? Do we find that in the most important concerns of the present life, in those where our most

most essential interests, our property, our welfare, our health, our reputation, our very life, are at stake, that no difficulties, no perplexities, no intricacies occur; that every thing is plain and level before us, and that we are never at a loss how to act, what opinion to form, or what course to take? There are few, I fancy, here present, whose experience has not taught them, to their cost, the very reverse of all this. If then, even in the ordinary affairs of life, there is so much difficulty, doubt, and obscurity, how can we wonder to find it in religion also, in those inquiries that relate to an invisible world and an invisible Being, "to the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity *?"

And let it never be forgotten, that mysteries

* "So far is it from being true (as some one has said) that where mystery begins, religion ends; that religion, even natural religion, *begins* with a mystery, with the greatest of all mysteries, the self-existence and eternity of God. Let any one tell us how an eternity can be past, unless it was once present, and how that can be once present which never had a beginning." Seed's Sermons, v. ii. S. 7. 459.

mysteries are not (as is often insinuated, and often taken for granted) peculiar to the Christian religion. They belong to *all* religions, even to that which is generally supposed to be of all others the least encumbered with difficulties, pure deism; or, as it is sometimes called, the religion of nature, of reason, or of philosophy.

Who, for instance, can grasp with the utmost stretch of his understanding, the idea of an Eternal Being; of a Being whose existence never had any beginning, and never will have an end? Where is the man whose thoughts are not lost and confounded in contemplating the immensity of a God who is intimately present to every part of the universe; who sees, with equal clearness, a kingdom perish and a sparrow fall, and to whom every thought of our hearts is perfectly well known *?

Who

* " J'apperçois Dieu partout dans ses œuvres. Je le sens en moi, je le vois tout autour de moi; mais sitôt que je veux le contempler en lui même, sitôt que je veux chercher où il est, ce qu'il est, quelle est sa substance, il m'echappe, & mon esprit trouble n'apperçoit plus

Who can reconcile that foreknowledge of future and contingent events, which is an unquestionable attribute of the Almighty, with that free will and free agency, which are no less unquestionable properties of man? Who, in fine, can account, on the principles of mere natural religion, for the introduction of natural and moral evil into the works of a benevolent Creator, whose infinite goodness must necessarily incline him to intend the happiness of all his creatures?

These

plus rien. Rousseau, v. viii. p. 32. Enfin plus je m'efforce de contempler son essence infinie, moins je la conçois; *mais elle est*, cela me suffit; moins je la conçois, plus je l'adore."

I have cited these fine passages from the eloquent Rousseau in his own language (for no translation can do justice to them) because no arguments are so convincing as those which are drawn from the concessions of sceptics themselves; which fall from them incidentally and undesignedly; and because the sentiments here quoted stand in direct contradiction to that writer's cavils in other places against the Christian mysteries. For if notwithstanding the difficulties which attend the contemplation of the Deity himself, he firmly believes his existence, on what ground can he make his Savoyard vicar doubt the truth of the Gospel on account of its mysteries * ?

* V. viii. p. 93.

These considerations may serve to show, and it might be shown in various other cases, that it is in vain to expect an exemption from difficulty and mystery in any religion whatever. The real truth is, that not only the religion of nature, but the philosophy of nature, the works of nature, the whole face of nature, are *full* of mystery; we live and move in the midst of mystery*. And if, to avoid this, we have recourse to atheism itself, even that will be found to be more encumbered with difficulties, and to require a greater degree of *faith*, than all the religions in the world put together.

Let not then the mysteries of the Gospel ever be a rock of offence to you, or in any

* This, M. Voltaire himself acknowledges; and it is a complete answer to all the objections he has made in various parts of his works to the mysteries of Revelation. See *Questions sur L'Encyclopedie.* Art. *Ame.*

"The whole intellectual world is full of truths *incomprehensible*, and yet *incontestable*. Such is the doctrine of the existence of God, and such are the mysteries admitted in *Protestant* communions." Rousseau, v. ii. p. 15.

any degree shake the constancy of your faith. They are inseparable from any religion that is suited to the nature, to the wants, and to the fallen state of such a creature as man. When once we are convinced that the Scriptures are the word of God, we are then bound to receive with implicit submission, on the sole authority of that word, those sublime truths, which are far beyond the reach of any finite understanding, but which it was natural and reasonable to expect in a revelation pertaining to that incomprehensible Being, whose "greatness is unsearchable, and whose ways are past finding out." Let us not, in short, "exercise ourselves too much and too curiously in great matters, which are too high for us, but refrain our souls, and keep them low *." Laying aside all the superfluity of learning, and all the pride of human wisdom, let us hold fast the profession of our faith, without wavering, and without cavilling at what we cannot comprehend. Let us put ourselves, without reserve,

* Psalm cxxxi. 2, 3.

reserve, into the hands of our heavenly Guide, and submit with boundless confidence to his direction, who, as he died to save us, will certainly never mislead us. Since we *know* in whom we believe; since we know that the author of our religion is the Son of God, let us never forget that this gives him a right, a divine right, to the obedience of our understandings, as well as to the obedience of our will. Let us therefore resolutely beat down every bold imagination, every high thing that exalteth itself against the mysterious truths of the Gospel; bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ, and receiving "with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to save our souls *."

Yet, however firmly we may believe all the great essential doctrines of the Gospel, this alone will not ensure our salvation, unless to our faith we add obedience to all the laws of Christ. This we are expressly told in the concluding verse of this chapter. After our Lord had prescribed to his disciples

* James i. 21.

disciples the form of words to be used in baptism, he adds, "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." As this is the parting direction, the farewell injunction which Jesus left with his disciples just before he ascended into heaven, it shows what peculiar stress he laid upon it. It shows that by making it the conclusion, the winding up as it were of his Gospel, he meant to express, in the strongest manner, the indispensable necessity of a holy life resulting from a vital faith. He meant to intimate to his own disciples, and to the ministers of his Gospel in every future age, that it was to be one principal object of their instructions and exhortations to inculcate all the virtues of a Christian life, and an unreserved obedience to all the precepts of their divine Master. And whoever neglects this branch of his duty, is guilty of manifesting a marked contempt of the very last command that fell from the lips of his departing Lord.

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The few words that follow this command, and which conclude the Gospel of St. Matthew, contain a promise full of consolation, not only to the apostles themselves, but to all the ministers of the Gospel in every succeeding age. "And, lo, says our blessed Lord, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." That is, although I am now about to leave you and ascend into heaven, and can no longer be personally present with you, yet the Holy Spirit, whom I have repeatedly promised to send unto you, shall certainly come to supply my place, shall constantly abide with you, and shall enlighten, guide, assist, support, and comfort you to the end of the world.

Here ends the Gospel of St. Matthew. But it must be observed, that in this last part of our Saviour's history, he has been much more concise than the other evangelists, and has passed over several circumstances which they have recorded, and of which it may be proper to take some notice here, before we close this Lecture.

It appears from the other evangelists, and from the Acts of the Apostles, that Jesus continued among his disciples for forty days after his resurrection, giving them repeated and infallible proofs of his being actually raised from the dead, and "speaking to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."*

In one of these discourses, he took occasion to advert more particularly to those things that were written in the law of Moses and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning him. He showed how exactly and minutely all the predictions respecting him, contained in those sacred books, were accomplished in his birth, his life, his doctrines, his sufferings, his death, and his resurrection.

This stamps at once a divine authority on those books, and gives a sanction to the interpretation of the passages alluded to, and the application of them to our blessed Lord, by our best and most learned expositors. It

* Luke xxiv. 44. Acts i. 3.

It is added, that on this occasion he *opened* their understandings, that they might understand the Scriptures, and said unto them, "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and rise from the dead the third day: and that *repentance and remission of sins* should be preached in his name amongst all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

He entered, we see, at large into the great evangelical doctrines of the atonement, of the redemption of mankind by his death, of the resurrection, of repentance, and the remission of sins through faith in his name. These are most important topics, and his illustration of them to his disciples must have opened to them an invaluable treasure of divine knowledge. And as these doctrines are but briefly touched upon in the Gospels, and more fully unfolded and explained in the Acts and the Epistles, it is highly probable that a very considerable part, if not the whole of what passed in these discourses of our Lord to his disciples after his

resurrection, is faithfully preserved and detailed in those inspired writings. This places in a very strong light the high importance of those writings, and the high rank they ought to hold in our estimation, as forming an essential part of the Christian system, and completing the code of doctrines and of duties contained in that divine revelation.

It is remarkable also, that St. Matthew has made no mention of the concluding act of our Lord's life on earth, his ascension into heaven. The reason of this omission is not perhaps very easy to assign, nor is it necessary. We know, that in several other instances various circumstances are omitted by one evangelist which are supplied by the rest, and others passed over by those which are noticed by the former; a plain proof by the way that they did not write in concert with each other, but each related his own story, and selected such facts and events as appeared to him most deserving of notice.

In the present case it is sufficient for

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our satisfaction that the ascension is related by two of the evangelists, St. Mark and St. Luke. The latter of these tells us in his Gospel, and in the Acts, that "Jesus led out his apostles (and the disciples that were with them) to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands and blessed them. And it came to pass while he blessed them, he was parted from them and carried up into heaven, and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly towards heaven, as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God *."

The last observation I have to make is, that neither St. Matthew, nor any other of

* Luke xxiv. 50—53.

of the evangelists, have given us a full and complete history of every thing that our Saviour did during the whole course of his ministry; but have only recorded the most important and the most remarkable of his transactions and his miracles. Beside, therefore, the many irresistible proofs we already possess of his divine wisdom and almighty power, there are many others still remaining behind, which might have been produced, but which the evangelists did not think it necessary to specify; for St. John, in the 20th chapter of his Gospel, makes this remarkable declaration: "Many other signs truly (says he) did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name." God grant that this effect may be produced on all who now hear me; otherwise my labours, and their attendance, will have been in vain!

I HAVE now brought these Lectures to a conclusion, and must here take my final leave of you. It was my original intention and my wish to have proceeded next to the Acts of the Apostles, which contain the history of the first propagation of the Christian religion, and the astonishing progress it made through a large part of the world, by the preaching of the apostles and their coadjutors, after our Lord's departure into heaven: but I must not now venture into so large a field. Circumstanced as I am, it would be presumption in me to expect either that God would grant me time to accomplish so arduous a work, or that you would have perseverance to bear with me to the conclusion. I must here therefore close my labours, at least in this place; and must now, for the last time, implore you to think and to meditate again and again on the important and interesting truths which have been unfolded to you in the course of these Lectures, and to form them into

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principles of action, and rules of conduct, for the regulation and direction of the remaining part of your lives.

In the history of our Lord, as given by St. Matthew, of which I have detailed the most essential parts, such a scene has been presented to your observation as cannot but have excited sensations of a very serious and very awful nature in your minds. You cannot but have seen that the divine Author of our religion is, beyond comparison, the most extraordinary and most important personage that ever appeared on this habitable globe. His birth, his life, his doctrines, his precepts, his miracles, his sufferings, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, are all without a parallel in the history of mankind. He called himself the Son of God, the Messiah predicted in the prophets, the great Redeemer and Deliverer of mankind, promised in the sacred writings, through successive ages, almost from the foundation of the world. He supported these great characters with uniformity, with consistence,

sistence, and with dignity, throughout the whole course of his ministry. The work he undertook was the greatest and most astonishing that can be conceived, and such as before never entered into the imagination of man. It was nothing less than the conversion of a whole world from the grossest ignorance, the most abandoned wickedness, and the most sottish idolatry, to the knowledge of the true God, to a pure and holy religion, and to faith in him, who was THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE. He proved himself to have a commission from Heaven, for those great purposes, by such demonstrations of divine wisdom, power, and goodness, as it is impossible for any fair and ingenuous and unprejudiced mind to resist. Of all this you have seen abundant instances in the course of these Lectures; and when all these circumstances are collected into one point of view, they present such a body of evidence, as must overpower by its weight all the trivial difficulties and objections that the wit of

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man can raise against the divine authority of the Gospel.

Consider, in the first place, the transcendent excellence of our Lord's character, so infinitely beyond that of every other moral teacher; the gentleness, the calmness, the composure, the dignity, the integrity, the spotless sanctity of his manners, so utterly inconsistent with every idea of enthusiasm or imposture; the compassion, the kindness, the tenderness he expressed for the whole human race, even for the worst of sinners, and the bitterest of his enemies; the perfect command he had over his own passions; the temper he preserved under the severest provocations; the patience, the meekness, with which he endured the cruellest insults, and the grossest indignities; the fortitude he displayed under the most excruciating torments; the sublimity and importance of his doctrines; the consummate wisdom and purity of his moral precepts, far exceeding the natural powers of a man born in the humblest situation, and in a remote

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and obscure corner of the world, without learning, education, languages, or books. Consider further the minute description of all the most material circumstances of his birth, life, sufferings, death, and resurrection, given by the ancient prophets many hundred years before he was born, and exactly fulfilled in him, and him only; the many astonishing miracles wrought by him in the open face of day, before thousands of spectators, the reality of which is proved by multitudes of the most unexceptionable witnesses, who sealed their testimony with their blood, and was even acknowledged by the earliest and most inveterate enemies of the Gospel. Above all, consider those two most remarkable occurrences in the history of our Lord, which have been particularly enlarged upon in these Lectures, and are alone sufficient to establish the divinity of his person and of his religion; I mean his wonderful prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, with every minute circumstance attending it; and

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that astonishing and well authenticated miracle of his resurrection from the grave, which was in the last Lecture set before you: and when you lay all these things together, and weigh them deliberately and impartially, your minds must be formed in a very peculiar manner indeed, if they are not most thoroughly impressed with faith in the Son of God, and the Gospel which he taught.

Taking it then for granted that you firmly believe the Scriptures to be the word of God, that of course they contain those heavenly doctrines and rules of life by which you are to be guided here and saved hereafter; that the present scene is nothing more than a state of trial and probation for another world; that all mankind must rise from the grave, and stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, to receive from his lips their final doom; and that there is NO OTHER NAME GIVEN UNDER HEAVEN BY WHICH YOU CAN BE SAVED, BUT THAT OF JESUS ONLY; no other possible way of escaping the

the punishments or obtaining the rewards of the Christian covenant, but faith in Christ, reliance on his merits, and an earnest endeavour to practise every virtue and fulfil every duty prescribed in his Gospel; taking it for granted that you believe all these things to be true, let me then ask you, what is the course of life which every wise man, which every man of common sense, must feel himself irresistibly called upon to pursue? Is it possible that with such awful, such divine truths as these deeply impressed upon your souls, you can allow yourselves to be so entirely occupied with the various pursuits of this life as to exclude, I will not say all *thought* (for that is impossible), but all serious solicitude concerning your future and eternal destiny? Are there any delights that this world has to offer that can compensate for the loss of heaven? Some of you have perhaps run your career of power, of pleasure, of gaiety, of luxury, of glory, and of fame, and can tell the true amount, the real value of these enjoy-

ments. Say then, honestly, whether any one of them has answered your expectations; whether they have left your minds perfectly content and satisfied; whether they have proved so solid, so durable, so perfect, as to be worth purchasing at the expense of eternal happiness? I will venture to abide by your answer. Trust then to your own experience, and be no longer the dupes of illusions which have so long misled you. And if you have any feeling, any pity for the young, the thoughtless, and the inexperienced, let them profit by the instructions, the salutary lessons you are so well qualified to give them; let your *warning voice* restrain them from rushing headlong into those errors, into which you have perhaps been unfortunately betrayed. Tell them (for you know it to be true), that whatever flattering prospects the world may present to their ardent imaginations at their first entrance into life, there is no solid ground for permanent comfort and content of mind, but a conscientious discharge of

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their duty to God and man, an anxious endeavour to recommend themselves to the favour of the Almighty, and a hope of pardon and acceptance through the merits of their Redeemer. These alone can smooth the path of life and the bed of death; these alone can bring a man peace at the last.

Reflections such as these must, in all times, and under all circumstances, operate most powerfully on every considerate mind; but they receive tenfold weight from the peculiar complexion of the present period, and the awful situation into which, by the dispensations of Providence, we are now cast. Never since the world began were such tremendous proofs held up to the observation of mankind, of the slender and precarious tenure on which we hold every thing that we deem most valuable in the present life, as have been of late presented to our view. Look around you for a moment; consider what has been passing on the continent of

Europe for the last ten years, and then say what is there left for you in this world worthy of your attention, on the possession of which, for any length of time, you can with any degree of security rely? You must have been very inattentive observers indeed, not to have perceived that all the great objects of human wishes, rank, power, honour, dignity, fame, riches, pleasures, gaieties, all the pomp, and pride, and splendour, and luxury of life, may, when you least think of it, contrary to all expectation and all probability, be swept away from you in one moment, and you yourselves thrown as it were a miserable wreck on some desert shore, not only without the elegancies and the comforts, but even without the common necessaries of life. That this is no imaginary representation, you all know too well; you see too many melancholy proofs of it in those unfortunate exiles who have taken refuge in this country; many of whom have experienced, in the utmost extent, the very calamities I have been

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here describing; and who, but a few years ago, had as little reason to expect such a dreadful reverse of fortune as any one who now hears me.

It is true, indeed, that hitherto we have been most wonderfully preserved by a kind Providence from those miseries that have desolated the rest of Europe, and have maintained a noble, though a bitter conflict, during many years, for our religion, our liberty, our independence, our unrivalled constitution, and every thing that is dear and valuable to man. But it must at the same time be admitted, that we are still in a most critical and doubtful situation, and that our final success must principally depend on that to which we have a thousand times owed our preservation, the favour and protection of Heaven.

The rapid, the astonishing, the unexampled vicissitudes, which have repeatedly taken place during the whole of this arduous contest, most clearly show that there is something in it more than common,

something out of the ordinary course of human affairs, something which baffles all conjecture and all calculation, and which all the wisdom of man cannot comprehend or control. What then *is* this something, what *is* this secret and invisible agent which so evidently overrules every important event in the present convulsive state of the world, and so frequently confounds the best-concerted projects and designs? Is it fate, is it necessity, is it chance, is it fortune? These, alas! we all know, are mere names, are mere unmeaning words, by which we express our total ignorance of the true cause. That cause *can* be nothing else than the hand of that Omnipotent Being, who first created and still preserves the universe; who is "the governor among the nations, and ruleth unto the ends of the earth." To make *Him* then our friend is of the very last importance; and it highly behoves us to consider, whether we have hitherto taken the right way to make him so. The answer to this question is, I fear,

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to be found in the unfavourable aspect of affairs abroad, and the severe distresses arising from unpropitious seasons at home, which too plainly show that the hand of the Almighty is upon us; that we are a sinful people, and He an offended God *.

Let it not, however, be imagined that I am here holding the language of despondency and despair; no, nothing can be farther from my thoughts. But in the present calamitous situation of this country, this glorious and still unrivalled country, to which all our hearts are bound by a thousand indissoluble ties, it would have been unpardonable in me to have passed over, with unfeeling apathy and cold indifference, those awakening and unexampled events which are forcing themselves every moment on our observation, and which call aloud on all the sons of men to reflect and to repent. I felt it to

* This Lecture was given in the Spring of the year 1801.

to be my indispensable duty, in this my last solemn address to you, to press upon you every motive to a holy life that could influence the heart of man, and with this view to draw your attention to all those astonishing scenes that are daily passing before your eyes, and which add irresistible force to every thing that has been advanced in the course of these Lectures. You now see displayed, in visible characters, in the actual vicissitudes of almost every hour, those great truths which I have been for four years past inculcating in words; the uncertainty of every earthly blessing, the vanity of all human pursuits, the instability of all worldly happiness, and the absolute necessity of looking out for some more solid ground to stand upon, some more durable treasures on which to fix our affections and our hearts. For many years past, God has been speaking to us by the various dispensations of his providence, by acts of mercy and of justice, by his interpositions to save us, by his judgments to correct us. He has been

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speaking a language which cannot be misunderstood, a language which is heard in every quarter of the globe, which makes all nature tremble, and shakes the very foundations of the earth.

Yet still, though there is just cause for apprehension, there is no occasion for despair. If from these judgments of the Lord we learn that lesson they were meant to teach us; if we turn, without delay, from the evil of our ways; if we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, and acknowledge our transgressions with the truest penitence and contrition of soul; if we set ourselves in earnest to relinquish every vicious habit, every secret fault, as well as every presumptuous sin; if we deny ourselves, and take up our cross to follow Christ; if we lay our follies, our vanities, our gaieties, our criminal indulgences, at the feet of our Redeemer, and purify ourselves even as he is pure; if in these times of unexampled scarcity of all

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the necessaries of life, we open our hearts and our hands wide to the necessities of our suffering brethren; if, in short, by the purity of our hearts, the sanctity of our lives, the fervour of our devotions, the sincerity of our faith and confidence in Christ, we recommend ourselves to the favour of Heaven, I scruple not to say, that we have nothing to fear. By the mighty hand of God we shall be protected here; by the merits of Him who died for us we shall be saved and rewarded hereafter. And we may, I trust, in this case, humbly apply to ourselves that consolatory declaration of the Almighty to another people, with which I shall finally close these Lectures; and which may God of his infinite mercy confirm to us all in this world, and in the next!

"How can I give thee up, Ephraim? My soul is turned within me. I will not execute the fierceness of my anger; I am God, and not man *. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with

* Hosea xi. 8, 9.

with everlasting kindness* will I have mercy on thee†."

* This *kindness* has in fact (as far as the public welfare is concerned) been in several important instances most graciously and conspicuously extended to this highly-favoured land since these Lectures were finished; and it evidently calls for every return, on our part, of affection and obedience to our heavenly Benefactor, that the deepest sense of gratitude can possibly dictate to devout and feeling hearts. March, 1802.

† Isaiah liv. 8.

THE END.

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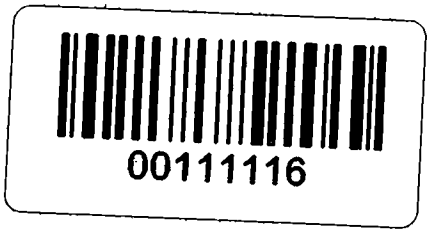
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